A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR POETS (1914-1918) : A REASSESSMENT

ABSTRACT

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

ENGLISH

BY

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Under the Supervision of

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2008

ABSTRACT

A Critical Study of the First World War Poets (1914 -1918): A Reassessment

In the present study, an attempt has been made to study five eminent poets of the First World War (1914-1918). They are Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, C. H. Sorley and Edmund Blunden. They are the poets who actually enlisted themselves in the war and therefore, they had the first hand experience of the conditions of the front and the life in trenches.

The first and the most important poet in this regard is Wilfred Owen. Owen's struggle with, loss, despair, pity and alienation threaten to undermine everything he fights for. Owen as a War Poet, addresses the realities of the war as they were. For example, in "*Disabled*" he not only reveals the 'young soldiers' physical wounds but also exposes the man's mental anguish and dissatisfaction with the current situation. He uses his poems to speak about the horrible terror he had experienced. Certainly Owen's war poetry is a driving force behind his

emergence as a strong and original poet of the First World War.

Owen's war experiences took him out of the boundaries of Romanticism. The quest for truth prompted some of his greatest works of the time. Like Sassoon Owen also wrote in reaction to the propagandized view of the war that was being made public throughout England. Newspaper accounts of the Great War seemed baseless and absurd. It added fuel to the fire and made him 'angry young poet'. As Paul Fussel rightly asserts that, though Owen had been strikingly optimistic but Owen's first hand experience in the mid of the January, 1917 changed everything. Owen wrote about his feelings in his poems to express his message as directly as possible. The cumulative effect of his war experiences opened an ideal avenue to raise questions about the meaning of war.

Some of his poems such as, "*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*", and "*Disabled*" lash out against what he may have considered the nonsensical and unaccountable death of young soldiers. Others such as "*The Last Laugh*", and "*The Sentry*", describe in detail the trauma and horrors of the trenches and the battlefields. Had he not joined the army, and experienced the trenches, probably he would not have penned his most

famous poems or be remembered as one of the greatest war poets of the First World War. Owen's war poetry is not only the truthful expression of the trench condition but a living memory for all generations to come. Had he survived, it is very difficult to say, where he would have led. Some critics are of the opinion that in Owen's case, it was the subject matter that made the poet. Unfortunately his untimely death could not allow Owen to prove it otherwise. Nevertheless, the poetry of Owen continues to draw attention and acclaim in every sense of the term.

The chapter on Sassoon's poetry focuses not only on the angry voice and disillusionment but also on his efforts to create a meaning out of the conflict. He still maintains his reputation among the readers of English poetry and hopefully will always inspire the greatest of all poets like Wilfred Owen and others as well. Sassoon's poetry is always said to be the voice of anger and disillusionment, but it also provided an opportunity to voices that had been silent. His sense of anger stems from his feelings of complete disillusionment. Sassoon's poetry denounces the war and its intensity of violence, aimed at wiping out the human civilization.

If Sassoon tries to hold on to his anger, Brooke attempts to step away from anger and disillusion. He takes war as a driving force of eternity and peace. It was war that provided him to seek shelter against the troubles and sufferings he was coping with.

Sorley corresponds to the elegiac tone speaking of the myriads who are destined to die. His prophetic imagination in his war poems is a testimony to the horrors of war that would swallow the mass of humanity. Sorley, perhaps, may be seen as a forerunner of Owen and Sassoon. His unsentimental style stands in direct contrast to that of Rupert Brooke. Sorley's last poem which was discovered from his kit after his death, include some of his most famous lines:

"When you see millions of mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go..."

Despite the horrors of the First World War Sorley felt it had freed his spirit. He stands out startlingly straightforward in search of a meaningful life hereafter. He seems to be fearless in search of spirituality.

Edmund Charles Blunden consequently goes into a grey land of loss, despair and hopelessness. Indeed he is not as violent

as Sassoon but the words and terminology he has used express a tireless and continuous sense of alienation, despair and helplessness. He shoots out words after words of frustration against the War. He seems to be a tired and helpless man searching for something meaningful. His personal accord of his war experiences in *Undertones of War* is hailed as the greatest and lasting tribute to the unknown soldier. He is well-known as a poet and autobiographer but was haunted, for the rest of his life, by his experiences as a young infantry officer.

In short, it may be concluded that after their bitter experience of the actual war, almost all of these Combatant Poets arrived at the universal truth that War is the greatest enemy of human civilization and development. In spite of their differences in conceptualization and presentation of the war, each of these poets faced the same existentialist problem.

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Dated 23.9.2008

This is to certify that Mr. Md. Imteyaz Ahmad has completed his Ph.D. thesis on **"A Critical Study of the First World War Poets (1914 – 1918): A Reassessment"** under my supervision.

To the best of my knowledge, it is based on the candidate's own study of the subject and is suitable for submission in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of Ph.D.

Rahatullah Khan

(Dr. Rahatullah Khan)

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Preface

The present study focuses on the English War Poets who enlisted themselves in the First World War (1914-1918) and wrote about their experiences extensively in their poetry. Some of them were not actually involved in fighting. Rupert Brooke, for example, died just before he could take part in the Gallipoli landings. Some were killed, but some of them survived to write of their experiences later.

The Poetry of these Combatant War Poets is considerable, and has left a profound impact on the course of English poetry since their time. The First World War was the first such occasion in which ordinary educated English civilians took part. No previous war left any poetic harvest at all from the actual combatants. I put these War Poets on the bounds of possibility that a rediscovery of their genuine poetic talent may be made.

In the present study I have confined myself to the poetry of ***five*** of the most prominent and gifted of these war poets. They are Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Charles Sorley, and Edmund Blunden. Though there are many others who are worthy of considerations but due to the constraints of the space (in a Ph.D thesis) they could not be included.

The whole study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter I is of an introductory nature, about the prevailing literary

situations just before the war broke out in 1914. Chapters II, III deal with Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon as war poets. While in chapter IV Rupert Brooke and Charles Sorley have been studied as war poets. Chapter V has been devoted to the study of Edmund Blunden's war poetry while in chapter VI a summing up of the whole study has been provided followed by a detailed biography with a view to assisting future researchers.

This, perhaps, is the most appropriate time to place on record my sincere sense of gratitude to those who helped me to complete this study. First of all, I express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Rahatullah Khan, Reader, Department of English, AMU, for his attention that he paid and concern that he has shown. I am also grateful to Professor Sohail Ahsan, Chairman, Department of English, AMU, and Prof. A.R. Kidwai for their help and cooperation. Thanks are also due to Maulana Azad Library AMU, Seminar Library D/o English, AMU, National Library, Kolkata, J.N.U, New Delhi and CIEFL, Hyderabad for their help and cooperation. Last but not the least I am indebted to my parents and other family members particularly my wife Ayesha for their unwavering support and help.

Date: 23.9.2008.

Place: Aligarh

(Md. Imteyaz Ahmad)

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

Poetic types and trends in the early two decades of the twentieth century witnessed new types of poetry in the history of English Literature. Certainly the poetry of this period was different from Romantics' and Victorians'. This phase of English Poetry showed the temper of the poetry of 'actual life' as expressed by W.B. Yeats, Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost. Irish poetry was inspired by a sense of nationalism. It was largely patriotic in its theme and content.

The other important groups of poets of the early twentieth century were those poets who contributed to the *Georgian Poetry* Vols. I-V edited by Edward Marsh, between 1912-1922. They were generally known as Georgian poets after the name of King George V (1910-1935). These Georgian Poets generally continued Romantic tradition of poetry, especially in their love for men, Nature and the countryside. Besides, they were also deeply attached to their land which they knew and loved best. While these poets were enjoying their weekend visits to the countryside and writing about Nature, supernatural elements,

dreams of Arabia and childhood etc. the First World War burst over their head in 1914. It rocked the whole world and raised many questions about human civilization and industrial development. It brought about a total change in the outlook of many of these poets. Many of the alert minds had to come out of their utopian world. Some of them directly participated in the war. Therefore, a new kind of Poetry came to be written during and after the First World War in which they extensively wrote about their experiences of war. The poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden and many others began to write on the field experiences of pity, horror, despair and hopelessness of the War. Dominic Hibberd rightly puts it when he says that "many young men who wrote poetry and took it seriously in the war years were either Georgians or were aware of the Georgians"[1]

The English Poetry of the First World War can, roughly, be divided into two periods: the early period, from the outbreak of the War to 1916, the time of the battle of the Somme; and the later period, from 1916 to 1918 and the Armistice. The two periods are very different in mood. In the earlier period the poet like Rupert Brooke, C.H. Sorley, Julian Grenfell Robert Nichols etc. believed in simple, heroic and mystic vision of a

struggle for the right, of noble sacrifice for an ideal of patriotism and country.

As the war prolonged, and dreams of an early end to the hostilities faded, the mood of the poet changed and darkened. It became a War of attrition, in which huge offensives were planned, again and again. It failed at a shattering cost in terms of material and lives. The carnage and sufferings were endless, pointless and full of horror. The dreams were shattered, and patriotism became a matter of grim endurance against all odds. The chief voices of this new mood among the poets, which brought forth what is still most memorable and enduring to later generations, are Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund and Isaac Rosenberg etc.

The First World War was a global military conflict which broke out in Europe from 1914 to 1918, resulting in more than forty million casualties, including approximately twenty million military and civilian deaths. The term War came into existence during and after the First World War. A number of poets writing in English had been soldiers, and had written about their experiences of the war. Many of them had died, most notably Rupert Brooke, Charles Hamilton Sorley, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg. Others such as Siegfried Sassoon,

Edmund Blunden etc. had survived and made a reputation based on their scathing poetry.

In chapters II to V an attempt has been made to analyse the poetry of each of these individual poets with a view to finding out as to how these poets represent the idea of war? What were their experiences? How did they manage to convey these experiences, and what was the impact of war on these sensitive souls which they ultimately expressed in their poetry?

Chapter II presents the poetic struggle of Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) widely regarded as the most important poet of the First World War. Owen would provide a fitting beginning to see the struggle of his poetry and the human need for meaning in terms of the War. Owen appeared to have thought of his poems as manifestos, truthful reports on what was happening on the Front. Owen wanted to stir compassion at its deepest level to reveal the naked truth of the war resulting in the loss of material and human lives. In the introduction for the volume of his collected poems published posthumously, he writes:

Above all I am not concerned with poetry. My subject is war, and the pity of war. The Poetry is in the pity. Yet these elegies

are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All the poet can do is to warn. That is why true poets must be truthful.[2]

The truth is, of course, capable of an astonishing musical orchestration in his finest and most mature poems. Owen's most famous and most anthologized poem, "Strange Meeting" is said to have been inspired consciously or unconsciously by the fifth canto of Shelley's *Revolt of Islam (Laos and Cythna) :*

"And one whose spear had pierced me, leaned beside,
With quivering lips and humid eyes;- and all
Seemed like some brothers on a journey wide
Gone forth, whom now strange meeting did befall
In a strange land, round one whom they might call
Their friend, their chief, their father, for assay
Of peril, which had saved them from the thrall
Of death, now suffering, Thus the vast array
Of those fraternal bonds were reconciled that day."

In both poems the speaker is accompanied by an enemy soldier whom he now considers an ally or friend. Owen's poem entitled "Strange meeting" deals with the meeting after death,

or in dreams, of one English soldier and a German soldier he had killed:

"It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred..."

This mysterious, harrowing and prophetic poem is also remarkable technically for its use of assonance, or para-rhyme to increase the effect of half-reality, half-dream that pervades through it. Owen used assonance in a number of other poems but no where more telling than in "Strange Meeting". Some of Owen's best-known poems were written as bitterly ironic comments or near parodies of well-known Romantic poems. An outstanding instance of this is the way he turned Swinburne's 'Before the Mirror' inside out in "Greater Love". Swinburne's initial stanza is:

'White rose in red rose-garden
Is not so white;
Snowdrops that plead for pardon
And pine for fright

Because the hard East blows

Over their maiden rows

Grow not as this face grows from pale to bright..."

(*CP*, ll. 1-7)

While Owen's feeling of scorn and revulsion against the languidly exotic mood can be imagined in: "Greater Love":

"Red lips are not so red

As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.

Kindness of wooed and wooer

Seems shame to their love pure.

O love, your eyes lose lure

When I behold eyes blinded in my stead! ..."

(*CP*, ll. 1-7)

As the war aggravated Owen clearly decided to tell the truth—his truth- and to make the most sharp-edged poetry possible out of his vision. When Graves suggested to him "that he should sometimes write more cheerful poems"[3], Owen's answer was to send him one of his greatest poems of the Great War. In this poem his irony, his uncompromising realism and his compassionate fellow-feeling with the sufferings of the soldiers are expressed as a counterpoint:

'I, too, saw God through mud,-

The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled.

War brought more glory to their eyes than blood,

And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a child..."

(CP, ll. 1-4)

In his later phase Owen adopted irony as a means of expressing his disgust and disillusionment with the War.

Chapter III deals with the experiences of Sassoon not as an overwhelmingly violent force but as a profound poetic voice of the First World War. Sassoon came from a well-to-do family. He was educated at Marlborough and Cambridge, without distinguishing himself scholastically either at the school or at the university. But in his earliest years he developed a passion for outdoor games and sports. In his first autobiographical book, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man, he* describes how cricket, golf, hunting etc. came to absorb more and more of his time and dreams. He began to write poetry at an early age- but his first poems written during his war time service show little more than his deeply ingrained love for the countryside, his belief in England's cause and the sense of 'fighting for our freedom'.

It was only later, with the experience of actual fighting that his highly sensitive nature began to feel the truth about soldiers' life in the trenches. This experience of death and suffering moved him and compelled him to record them in his poetry. He was a fearless soldier and was known as 'Kangaroo'. Like so many other early poets, Sassoon also voiced the idealism of the first months of the war. "Absolution" for example, was admittedly influenced by Brooke's famous sonnet sequence. Sassoon celebrates the moral change provided by the war:

"The anguish of the earth absolves our eyes
Till beauty shines in all that we can see.
War is our scourge, yet war has made us wise,
And, fighting for our freedom, we are free..."

(*CP*, ll. 1-4)

Sassoon's early poems of 1915 do not embody any profound attitude towards the conflict. During his period of initiation onto trench fighting he wrote no poems that voice any sudden disillusionment; the transition from naïve idealism to the realistic attitude. In early 1916 Sassoon began to produce a few 'genuine trench poems' which "aimed at impersonal description of front-line conditions".[5]

"*The Redeemer*", and "*A Working Party*" were written from the point of view of an interested but not deeply affected spectator.

But the battle of Somme deepened this mood, and he began to write poems full of bitterness, satire and anguish. In these poems the feeling is too deep, and too sincere.

Sassoon's longer poems portray more realistic description of the war situation. His description of the horrors of the war achieves its mounting effect in such poems. The most important war poems of *The Old Huntsman* present the character of Sassoon's response during the course of a single year, from January 1916 to January 1917. That year was psychologically the most crucial of the entire war. And Sassoon's poetic growth clearly accompanies the growing disaffection of 1916. The thirty-nine poems of *Counter Attack* were written during Sassoon's second period of convalescence in England. At this stage he was undergoing with the profound personal crisis which resulted in his anger and disillusionment against the war. The tormented state of mind produced agonized poems of *Counter Attack.*

The chapter IV of the study discusses the war poets of the early period – Rupert Brooke and Charles Sorley. The first part

of the chapter deals with Rupert Brooke's vision of patriotism, glory and aspiration of death to find a meaning in the meaningless world. Rupert Brooke was a young man of remarkable charm and beauty. He won Scholarship to King's College Cambridge, where he spent five years as a leader of the literary world. He began to publish poems in Journals in 1909, the year in which he settled at Granchester. His collection *Poems 1911* was well received. In 1912 he wrote a stark one-Act play *Lithuania* and suffered a serious breakdown which led him in to travel to the U.S. in 1913. In Tahiti he wrote *Tiara Tahiti* and *other poems*, often considered among his best. His five War sonnets, which included "*The soldier*" (If I should die think only this of me.....) appeared in New Numbers early in 1915. The ecstatic reception they received made him the nation's poet of the War, a reputation enhanced by the publication of *1914 and Other Poems*. His is an important name among the poets of the First World War. His five largely acclaimed war sonnets have been thoroughly analysed in the present study. Since they (sonnets) are the most anthologized poems of the war period. Their realism and the depth of understanding have found an echo in the experience of the disillusioned post war generations.

Brooke became famous for his innocence writing. The extraordinary syntax of Brooke's poems show gradual symphony of worthiness and worthlessness. The innocence of Brooke is a liberating and humanizing force for him. The war provided him a way out to escape from the ills of the world. As John Lehman rightly opines: "It was war that changed Brooke into the almost sacred and supreme poet figure of his generation..."[6]

Brooke's sonnet I "*Peace*" propounds the idea that war is clean and cleansing like a Jolly good swim. According to him the only thing that can suffer in war is the body. Sonnet II "Safety" testifies how War may lead to death which is the safest of all shelters against the dangers of life. Sonnet III "*The Dead*" is a conventional voice, 'Honour has come back, as a king to earth...' Sonnet IV "*The Dead*" concerns the past life of the dead. Sonnet V "*The Soldier*" is "a frank and unashamed piece of patriotism..."[7]

Charles Sorley's *Marlborough and Other Poems* was published in 1916, a year after he was killed by a sniper's bullet. By 1919 it had run through four editions; a fifth appeared in 1922. Sorley's name and fame rests with some of his remarkable war poems of the time.

Enright rightly says that the "poems that Sorley wrote in the last years of his life express new attitudes to the war which is quite different from those of Brooke and Grenfell. They are the attitudes of men who have known the horror and boredom of modern warfare at first hand"[8]

Sassoon having experienced the horror of actual warfare, began to describe its true nature in his satirical poems. Owen was profoundly and intensely exploring the tragedy and the pity of war, and wrote some of the greatest poems inspired by the Great War of 1914-1918. In this sense Sorley is a stepping-stone from Brooke to Sassoon. Sorley does not echo the sentiments of Brooke or of the patriotic versifiers of 1914. It is assumed that he felt no hatred of the Germans, but declared that, "the British and the German soldiers were linked in a common tragedy; it seems natural to suppose that he was anticipating the emotional responses of Owen and of Rosenberg, and foreshadowing their beliefs about the pity of war."[9]

Besides his poems Sorley's letters are also an extraordinary record of the growth of an original and independent outlook. They demonstrate the incalculable effects of the war. It is chiefly through his letters that Sorley's personality is known to

us. In his few poems and in his letters Sorley not only displays a grasp of the essential truths but also anticipates the bitter revelations which were to inspire Sassoon's satiric utterances as well as Owen's vision of destruction.

Chapter V focuses on yet another important poet Edmund Blunden (1896-1974). He was a countryman born and bred with country tradition in English poetry. He wrote a number of poems which clearly indicate the deeply moving characteristic of the man and his attitude to the war. Probably the most impressive and the most comprehensive of Blunden's war poetry is his long blank-verse poem, "*Third Ypres*". The following lines may be cited as his deeply tragic and worst of his war experiences:

"The grey rain,
Steady as the sand in an hourglass on this day,
Where through the window the red lilac looks,
And all's still, the chair's odd click is noise-
The rain is all heaven's answer, and with hearts
Past reckoning we are carried into night
And even sleep is nodding here and there..."

(*CP*, ll. 55-62)

Most of the war poets ultimately confined themselves to the ugli face of the war. But in Blunden succeeded in retaining his intellectual and imaginative capabilities. His senses always remain equally active for the beauty as well as the horror and repercussions of the war.

Blunden's poems see the struggle as a destroying agent of Nature and the humanity. His sense of despair, loss, isolation and hopelessness is represented through his war poems. His poetry presents the war as a deliberate, purposeless activity which has threatened the existence.

In brief it may be said that initially some of these war poets were full of patriotic feeling and believed that they were fighting for a just and noble cause but ultimately they seem to be disappointed. They realized that war was a destroying force which reduces human beings and their beliefs to hopelessness, despair and agony. Despite their differences in conceptualization and presentation of the war each of these poets face the same existentialist problem.

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CHAPTER – II

WILFRED EDWARD SALTER OWEN

(1893-1918)

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918) was born in 1893 in Oswestry in Shropshire. Owen entered Shrewsbury Technical School, after the family moved, as a 'day boy' until 1911 when he matriculated at London University. He began as a teacher of English at the Berlitz School in Bordeaux. While he was studying in Bordeaux he visited the War hospital there and saw that operations were being performed without any anaesthetics on the soldiers wounded in the early days of the War. Finally he returned to England in the late summer of 1915, and soon joined the Artist's Rifles.

Wilfred Owen is best remembered as one of the great First World war Poets; "For many young people", Dominic Hibberd says, "he is now the archetypal voice of 1914-18, even though ... it is highly misleading to see him as representative, he was a unique and extraordinary figure, unlike any other poet or soldier of his time".[1] C. Day Lewis, in his introduction on Owen's War poems, is of the opinion that "Owen's poems are

the finest written by any English poet of the First World War and probably the greatest poems about War in our literature".[2]

During Owens's life time, however, only four of his poems were published. While the rest of them were published posthumously, and this is the reason Owen's fame as a poet came long after he was killed.

Although Owen's life was tragically cut-short at the age of twenty-five years, yet in his brief span of life he experimented with a variety of forms and styles in his poetry. His styles have been characterized by features recognized as Romantic, Decadent, Georgian and Modernist. Apart from all these varied areas of influences on Owen's personal identity he was also influenced to a large extent by his interactions with other people, from family members to friends and poets, who had died nearly a century before his birth.

Over the years, Owen's poetry has been evaluated comprehensively and in varied ways. Most of the criticism on Owen focuses on his poetic technique. The critics examine how Owen used form to create a certain effect and how he deviated from the traditional form to create other effects. Owen's style and technique, over the course of his career as a

poet, kept on changing. This change has been attributed to many factors, which include Tailhade, S. Sassoon and other poets; besides his experience of the Great War.

In this Chapter, on Owen, I therefore intend to discuss the fact that despite the varied forms of influences, Owen's experience in the First World War played a crucial role in helping him find not only his own poetic voice but also an effective language to convey the horrors of the First World War. His poetry is in fact a realization of the horrible realities of modern warfare - "a sense of alienation, loss and despair".[3] The most notable aspect of Owen's poetry is the quality and nature of modern warfare that the readers may easily discern in his poetry.

Owen's understanding of poets and poetry was based on the styles and conventions of the 19th century British Romantic Poets; especially John Keats and P.B. Shelley. In these two poets Owen found both personal and poetic insight and inspiration. Keats became to Owen a kindred spirit and a kind of personal hero. Shelley on the other hand did not appeal to Owen on a personal level as Keats did. Instead, Owen admired Shelley for his poetic genius. Owen's admiration for these poets and their contemporaries exist not only in Owen's own poetry but also many of his letters are the evidence in this

regard. Owen did attempt to become a Romantic poet like his heroes. However, just as Owen reached the climax of his poetic talent, he found himself into the midst of the horrors of the First World War. As a result Owen's War poems are a collection enriched with the characteristics of loss, despair, alienation and meaninglessness of the contemporary scenario.

It was not until New Year's Eve 1917, less than a year away from his untimely and tragic death that Wilfred Owen considered himself worthy of being deemed a poet: "I go out of this year a poet my dear Mother, as which I did not enter it".(*CL*, l. 521)

It was during Keats's annus mirabilis, 1818-19, that the poet wrote many of his finest poems. Like Keats, Owen also did the majority of his best work during a similar annus mirabilis in 1917-18. In early 1917, Owen was hospitalized at Craiglockhart Hospital due to shell shock after having fought unrelieved for twelve consecutive days and being "forced to take refuge for several days in a hole with a month-old bits and pieces of another British officer".[4] It was during his hospitalization that Owen's poetry changed dramatically and many of his most famous War poems were composed.

Alan Tomlinson says that Owen seems to have also been heavily influenced by P.B. Shelley:

It is true that there are fewer references to Shelley in Owen's letters than there are to Keats, and that Owen does not write of Shelley in that tone of intimate and exalted affection that he reserves for Keats. "Keats was "the poet", magically gifted and romantically doomed and his remarks about Keats constantly show how strongly he identified himself with him. In a letter written to his mother on January 26, 1912, however, he calls Shelley "the brightest genius of his time".[5]

Tomlinson also explores the Shelleyan influence apparent in Owen's famous War poem "*Strange Meeting*" Both the title of the poem and its basic plot come from Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam.* In Canto Fifth, Stanza xiii of Revolt, Shelley writes:

"And one whose spear had pierced me, leaned beside
With quivering lips and humid eyes; and all Seemed, like some
brothers on a journey wide
Gone forth, whom now strange meeting did befall
In a strange land, round one whom they might call
Their friend, their chief, their father, for assay
Of peril, which had saved them from the thrall,

Of death, now suffering. Thus the vast array

Of those fraternal bonds were reconciled that day".

Looking only at this stanza from which Owen's famous title was drawn, numerous comparisons could be made between "The Revolt of Islam" and Owen's "*Strange Meeting*". Owen's final stanza for example, is a direct reflection of Shelley's above quoted lines:

"I am the enemy you killed my friend.

I knew in this dark: for so you frowned

Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.

I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.

Let us sleep now..."

(*CP*,ll. 40-44)

In both poems, speaker is accompanied by an enemy soldier whom he now considers an ally or friend. Shelley establishes this relationship through elaborate detail involving fraternal connection; he uses phrases such as "seemed like some brothers" or "fraternal bands were reconciled" to make his point. Owen achieves the same effect with two simple words: "my friend". "*Strange Meeting*" unlike Shelley's poem,

"...through me as you jabbed and killed", in a line that once again reflects "The Revolt of Islam".

As Owen matured and experienced the horrors of the War, the Romantic influence remained but these elements of Romanticism took on a new meaning. Rather than simply imitating the style, Owen began to use his romantic notions ironically as a means of expressing his disgust and disillusionment with the War.

The next phase in Owen's poetic development began in September 1913 when he left England for France. This move marked Owen's final break from his family, and he seems to have relished the freedom. Details of a few of Owen's new found pleasures, along with some of his mother's objections to his new life style can be seen in the following lines:

> "In France, there was no one to object when he drank wine with meals like a local, or when he attended social events on Sundays in preference to giving to Church. He took up smoking, developing a passion for Egyptian cigarettes. Susan remonstrated from Shrewsbury in vain. Within a week or two of his arrival he exercised his new -

found liberty by agreeing to take part in a music-hall act despite her horror of Theatres".[6]

Although Owen's contact with Monro and Sassoon was concurrent to his military training and war experience, the two poets had an impact on Owen that was above and beyond what he was experiencing in his own life. Both men acted as critics to Owen and played an important role in helping Owen find the poetic voice for which he would be remembered. The most notable quality of modern warfare that are easily discernable in Owen's war poems are as follows;

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms- as the expression of new moods- and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods... In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject...
4. To present an image (hence the name; Imagist".
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.[7]

In essence, Imagism called for the poetic representation of an image or idea through clear, concise, and uncomplicated language.

These features, in conjunction with his terrible and tragic content, make Owen's poetry heading towards modernism. Following the numerous and varied poetic influences in his lifetime, Owen's War experience was largely responsible for his movement away from his Romantic roots to modernism.

> When Owen was apparently considering enlisting himself in the army as early as November 1914, he wrote more seriously on the notion in a June 1915 letter to his mother. "I told (Harold).... When I return home in Sept. I should try to join the Army. For I noticed in the hotel London an announcement that any gentleman(fit etc,) returning to England from abroad will be given a Commission- in the 'Artists' Rifles'. Such officers will be sent to the front in three months".[8]

In fact, much of Owen's motivation for fighting came directly from the propaganda campaign going on in England. . Because of the wide availability of English newspapers in Bordeaux (France) Owen would have been "well aware of the intense

enlistment campaign which was urging upon the young men to perform their duty in what had already been called the Great War".[9]

Four months after telling his mother that he was considering enlisting himself, Owen joined the Artists' Rifles, though , as Douglas Kerr points out in his "The disciplines of the Wars": Army training and the language of Wilfred Owen", the decision "had not been an enthusiastic one"[10] for Owen as it was not readily understood by or acceptable to his family":

To his family he had seemed supremely inapt for the army. His family never considered him fit for army because his Bohemian affectations, his vagueness, his disdain for the practical, and disinclination for the athletic. 'The very idea of him soldiering,' says Harold Owen, 'seemed to us all too fascinating to seriously think about".[11]

Owen expressed his own doubts and feelings of indecision to his mother: "I don't want the bore of training, I don't want to wear khaki; nor yet to save my honour before inquisitive grand-children fifty years hence. But I now do most intensely want to fight".[12] And he fought despite his doubts and his

family's disbelief. Once enlisted and inspected, Owen began his actual army training on October 25, 1915.

After entering the military life style to which he was unaccustomed, Owen felt isolated and cut off from the world he had known prior to joining the army. Besides the initial shock at his new life style and the rigorous training he was undergoing, Owen must have also felt alienated as a poet. His poetic ambitions stood in sharp contrast to the expectations from him as a soldier in the British Army. As Kerr has rightly pointed pout:

"His career had been in his own eyes a series of struggles to free himself from tyrannical authority; this was an essential prelude to poetic success, finding his own voice. But now he had bound himself over to a discipline of absolute obedience, in the most unpoetic and unlovely company, in an institution whose first actions included giving him a number and a uniform. It was a multiple transformation; the poet became a soldier, the expatriate a patriot, the teacher a trainee, the elder a cadet".[13]

Owen wrote about his feelings, emphasizing the newness and strangeness of the situation in which he found himself:

'I am an exile here, suddenly cut off both from the present day world and from my own past life. I feel more in a strange land than when arriving at Bordeaux1 it is due to the complete newness of the country, the people, my dress, my duties, the air, food, everything".[14]

The most notable feature among his list of 'news" in regard to his changing poetry is the new dialect he encountered in the military. Along with physical and tactical military training, Owen was also learning a new language- the language of the army- that would later appear in his war poems, giving them an outlook of modernism. Kerr's remark is very appropriate when he says, "Wilfred Owen's best known writing deals with the life and death of soldiers; and among the cultural codes that mingle to create his style, the language of the army is obviously prominent".[15] This new language would have seemed to Owen to be in sharp contrast with his ideal of what language should be:

"He was immersed in and set learn the army's language in what must have seemed the most blatant discursive clash with what he wanted language to be..."[16] The poetry to which he aspired was romantic self-expression, and the poet for him was a hypersensitive individual prized for his originality, the

celebrant and creator of beauty and pleasure. There had been epical swashbuckling times when military and poetic speech consorted comfortably, but not Wilfred Owen's idea of poetry and his idea of the army"

Owen also gained new experiences and subject matter to write about. One of Owen's critics has rightly pointed out, "When the army became available to Owen as a literary subject, it gave his writing a field of material observation and at the same time a new quality of terseness, where before he had tended to luxuriance".[17] Owen's "*S.I.W*" is an example of his abbreviated style:

"One dawn, our wire patrol
Carried him. This time, Death had not missed.
We could do nothing but wipe his bleeding cough.
Could it be accident?- Riffles go off...
Not sniped? No.(later they found the English ball)"

(*CP*,ll. 25-29)

Owen here does not use a singular, even once, first person pronoun but rather speaks of himself as part of a group. The last two lines, for example, are a series of questions and

answers, all of which are written as they might have been spoken on the battlefield.

Owen's language at its best is direct, clear cut and wastes no words in presenting the point. In The poem *'Disabled"* Owen describes a young soldier who has returned home legless, recalling his glorious days as a footballer before the War:

"He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow..."

(*CP*, ll.1-3)

As the young man thinks back on his youth, Owen describes his body and the injuries it has endured to show how much the boy has been changed by the war:

"And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,-
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands;
All of them touch him like some queer disease'.

(*CP*,ll. 9-13)

The strongest rhyming pair in this stanza, knees/ disease, emphasizes the new body part, the knees, while showing that the boy is flawed or diseased now that he no longer has them.

Owen continues emphatically contrasting the wounds inflicted by war to those caused by sports and games. In doing this, he notes various aspects of the young man's body: back, thigh, leg, shoulder and coloration and in the process exposes the hollow cynicism of the propaganda that had led him and so many others to join the War:

"Now he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh".

(*CP*, ll. 16-20)

In these lines Owen characterizes the young man as "old", describing his physical ailments. The man's back is now weak while once upon a time it had been strong, and his skin pale instead of tan. The 'leap of purple' is blood drawn by enemy fire. Owen uses this image to return to the images of the

propaganda campaign which had inspired many young men to join the War:

"One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches, carried shoulder high.
It was after football, when he had drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join. – He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look good in kilts,
That's why; and may be, too, to please his Meg..."

(*CP*, ll. 21-26)

One of the prominent images of the poem, that of the young man being "carried shoulder high", is an echo of A. E. Housman's 1896 poem, "*To an Athlete Dying Young*".

"The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering boy,
And home we brought you shoulder-high".

(*CP*, ll. 1-4)

Housman provides a romanticized image of a young English athlete, hoisted high, forever frozen in glory. It is an image that may well have inspired some of the propaganda posters of the

Great War, and it stands in sharp contrast with the other images of war-induced injuries that Owen uses in his poem.

Owen uses his poetry to address the realities of War. In the case of "*Disabled*", for example, Owen not only reveals the young soldier's physical wounds, but also exposes the man's mental anguish. Owen's poem speaks out about the terrible horrors he had experienced. This new style of writing, with its coarseness and directness forged by his army experience, breaks with Romantic and Edwardian tradition and makes Owen a modern poet.

In Brooke's poem paradoxically entitled "*Peace*" the speaker commemorates the beginning of the War, sees the fight with the Central Powers as a divinely given opportunity to rouse the young men of England from their complacent post-Victorian stupor. "Now God be thanked who has matched us with His hour/ And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping", he says (*CP*, ll.16). With a "sharpened power", a "hand made sure", and "clear eye". These young will, the speaker says, "turn to the war "as swimmers into cleanness leaping". In Brooke the war is figured as invigorating- purifying swim that will give English men's lives clarity and meaning.

The first poem in which Owen expresses a deeply felt reaction to the war is the sonnet entitled "*Happiness*". Here the poet contrasts the innocent happiness of boyhood with the deeper joys and sorrows of experience- in this case the morally dubious experience of the First World War is quite clear:

"But the old happiness is unreturning
Boys have no grief as grievous as youth's yearning;
Boys have no sadness sadder than our hope."

(*CP*, ll.12-15)

Here Owen cites lines dealing with the loss of youthful innocence. He thinks that the days which have gone by can not return the innocent life of the child is away from the cruelty of the world. A child is an angel of his time. The child's innocence is always unaware of the wrongs and evils of the world. But the stage in which the poet sees himself, is full of sorrows and grieves.

"*Exposure*", which is considered to be the first important War poem of Owen, seems to be particularization of the transforming experiences. The first few stanzas of the poem describe the winter "landscape of No Man's Land and recall the

vivid depiction of the scene in the poet's letter of January".[18] In "*Exposure*" the poet says:

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds
That knive us...
Wearied we keep away because the night is silent...
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the
Salient...
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous'
But nothing happens.
Watching we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here."

(*CP*, ll. 1-11)

The impressions of agonized minds and bodies portray the terrible effects of winter trench warfare. As J. Loiseau has correctly pointed out "the opening lines echo Keats's "*Ode to a Nightingale*". "The peculiar blankness of the words, "But nothing happens" suggest a contrast between the range of positive experience that Keats explores in his ode and the essentially negative experience of war, which draws the senses

filled with misery and apprehension".[19] The feeling of tension, monotony, and defeated expectations is reinforced by the voice of para-rhyme. These lines create a painful discord of the situation. They convey the message of the terrible experiences he was undergoing. The initial lines of the poem depict the numbing wretchedness of a winter night in the trenches.

In the last two stanzas of the same poem the descriptive focus shifts. Overwhelmed by the tedium and misery, the soldier falls into a trancelike state; they dream first of spring, then of the warmth and peace of home:

"Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk
Fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house
is theirs;
shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors
are closed,--
... To-night, His frost will fasten on his mud and us,
Shriveling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp,

The burying- party, picks and showels in their
Shaking grasp,

Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,

But nothing happens."

(*CP*,ll. 28-41)

These lines bring the physical ordeal in relation to the soldiers' sufferings which is futile and meaningless. The theme of this poem develops in terms of a paradox. The poet is not only an observer of the situation but he seeks some meaning for his own and others' sufferings. These lines of the poem are also an effort to reconcile the disparity between the unredeemed evil of war and the positives inherent in the religion.

Owen's process of poetic development is an instinctive adjustment rather than a conscious effort. His outlook has been changed by the overwhelming experience of the Great War. And his search for his new comprehension came from the inward need to say the thing he had to say most exactly and finally. As in "*Dulce et Decorum Est*":

"If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace

Behind the wagon that we flung him in,

And watch the white eyes writhing his face,

His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,

Bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,-

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old: lie: Dulce et decorum est

Pro patria mori"

(*CP*,ll. 17-28)

These lines are about the vivid description of physical and psychological sufferings caused by the war. The emphasis is on the shocking realistic details of the war. Here we are invited to share the poet's experience in watching the agonies of a gassed and dying soldier. It exclusively focuses on the individual agony simultaneously insisting on the impossibility of the spectators conceiving it.

The other poem of this period "*The Dead Beat'*, depicts a soldier whose ideology and expectation have been shattered by the War. He dies unwounded, unmarked– a victim, apparently suspected of forces more sinister than shells or bullets. This poem seems to be in affinities with Sassoon's "*Lamentations*", and "*Suicide in the Trenches*" both of which portray the effects of utter personal demoralization:

"We sent him down at last, out of the way.

Unwounded;--- stout lad, too, before that strafe.

Malingering? Stretcher- bearers winked, "Not half!"

Next day I heard the Doc.'s well-whisked laugh:

"That scum you sent last night soon died. Hooray."

(*CP*,ll. 16-20)

The speaker is astonished on the predicament of the soldier who was hale and hearty while going on the trench. But soon his death is reported. Its an ironical situation portraying the utter moral demoralization. Owen, here, shows his ironical attitude, uncompromising realism and his compassionate fellow-feelings with the sufferings of the soldiers.

Much more in Owen's natural poetic vein than "*The Dead Beat*" is "*Anthem for Doomed Youth*". The grave elegiac tone of this sonnet differs from the open discords of "Exposure". Careful modulation of music of the poem embodies a deeper and more subtle sense of disharmony:

"What passing- bells for these who die as cattle?

Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries for them from prayers or bells,

Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,-

The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;

And bugles calling for them from sad shires..."

(*CP*, ll. 1-8)

These lines contain many images related to death and mourning etc. The speaker uses 'simile' to describe the soldiers dying in the battle as 'cattle'. Owen here balances the consolatory rituals of Christian burial against the degradation of those "who die as cattle". Bells, orisons, prayers, choirs, candles – constitute a visible and audible commemoration of death. What Owen tries here to suggest is that Christianity is no longer equal to the universal principles which it invokes because it had betrayed itself by failing to condemn the evils of War. The imagery in these lines indicate, "how far Owen had progressed beyond the slack and superficial art of the Georgians".[20]

Another poem "*Asleep*" has very close thematic relationship with "Anthem for Doomed Youth". Both poems are elegiac in their tone and approach. In the second part of "*Asleep*" Owen depicts a vague but comfortable hereafter which embodies both the truth of the Christian promise and

conventionalization in religious art and poetry. In this poem he contrasts hereafter with the physical actuality:

"Whether his deeper sleep lie shaded by the shaking
Of great wings, and the thoughts that hung the stars,
High-pillowed on calm pillows of God's making
Above these clouds, these rains, these sleets of lead,
And these winds' scimitars;
Or whether yet his thin and sodden head
Confuses more and more with the low mould,
His hair being one with the grey grass
And finished fields of autumns that are old..."

(*CP*, ll.10-18)

There is a conflict in these lines which leave the poet- cold, weary and mindful of his own pain. Here the heavens are "High pillowed in calm pillows of God's making". However, it clearly favours the force of an experienced reality. Owen contrives at once to underpin metaphysical speculation with inescapable physical fact:

"Who knows? Who hopes? Who troubles? Let it pass!
He sleeps. He sleeps less tremulous, less cold,
Than we who must awake, and waking, say Alas!"

(CP, ll. 19-21)

In spite of the fact that the poem ends on a note of pessimism, Owen does not completely reject the Christian attitude. The se lines indicate emotional gradation and the irony of the condition of the war. These lines convey the message that the state of the dead needs less pity than that of the living. Owen leaves us with the impression that death is the poet's enemy against whom the poet has to wage war 'for life'.

The idea behind all this attitude of Owen towards War is the meaninglessness and confusion of war which intruded into his poetry. Owen's para-rhymes express the noise of this confusion.

In "*The last Laugh*" Owen's modes of presenting the confusion and horrors of War could be witnessed as in the following:

"O Jesus Christ1 I 'm hit', he said; and died.
Whether he vainly cursed, or prayed indeed,
The Bullets chirped- in vain! vain! vain!
Machine gun chuckled,--Tut-Tut Tut-Tut!
And the big Gun guffawed.
another sighed,-'O Mother, mother! Dad!
Then smiled, at nothing, childlike, being dead..."

(CP, ll. 1-7)

Owen's mode of presenting the confusion and the horrors of War is just as the cry of "Jesus Christ". The soldiers love for his parents is turned into the final moments of his life: "O Mother, --Mother, --Dad! the soldier calls out as he is wounded". The smile of the child is turned into the look of mortality.

In "*Inspection*" an officer inspecting a soldier who has come back from the front discovers a "spot" on the enlisted man's uniform and reprimands him for being "dirt on parade" when the soldier explains that the spot is blood, an officer curtly replies, "well , blood is dirt".

The speaker in the poem "*Futility*" indicates the remembrance of how the "kind old sun" always "wakes the seeds" and how it "woke once the clays of a cold star, "Earth, he laments the "futility" of the "famous" sunbeams" trying to stir the "clay" of a soldier's corpse that lies before him. All these references and words are implying the chaos and blood dirt on the war front.

Owen's poems such as "*The Parable of the Old Man*" and "*Disabled*" lash out against what he may have considered the senseless death of so many soldiers. Others such as "*The Last Laugh*" and "*The Sentry*", describe in detail the trauma and

horrors of the trenches and the war front. Some, which are arguably the greatest, do both. Owen in many of his war poems prefers common language to his poetic approach.

In "*The Letter*", a poem in which a soldier is writing home to his wife while simultaneously talking to his companions:

"I'm in the pink at present, dear.
I think the war will end this year
We don't see much of the square-'eaded 'Uns.
We're out of harm's way, not bad fed.
I'm longing for a taste of your old buns.
(Say, Jimmie, spare's a bite of bread.)"

(*CP*, ll. 3-8)

In these lines Owen experiments with meter and rhyme to achieve the particular effect, including a strong visual image. In addition to this, these lines also illustrate the alienation, loss and despair. The man in the poem is alone, seemingly deserted by the rest of the world.

The following lines of "*Dulce Et Decorum Est*" speak volumes about the war. From the doldrums of marching across a barren battlefield to the soaring panic of a gas attack. Owen presence details of emotions, sights, and sounds experienced

by the soldiers on the front lines in an honest and clear-cut manner. The opening lines of the poem depict the scene:

"Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five- Nines that dropped behind."

(*CP*, ll. 1-8)

The poet describes the exhaustion that the men felt, words like "trudge", 'drunk", and "fatigue" add to the feeling. Many of the men who have no shoes, yet they march on toward "distant rest", though it remains unclear whether that rest is death or the premise of home. All are "lame", "blind", and "deaf". Owen exposes that these men are no longer gloriously marching off into the battle as they were so often portrayed, but rather they are unwillingly hobbling slowly through the mud. The tone of the stanza is that of monotony and exhaustion.

Then, startlingly, the next stanza begins with panic, emphasizing the chaos of the front, in contrast to the image of an organized precision being presented back home:

"Gas! Gas! Quick, boys- An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone was still yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning."

(*CP*, ll. 9-16)

Perkins aptly describes the technique of this section of the poem when he says that the "the effect of reality is achieved primarily through the action itself, the shock and horror of the gas attack."[21] The effect is sustained through observed detail ("Bent double", "Knock kneed", "Many had lost their boots"). In these words Owen accurately corresponds to the sensation and horrors of the war. The repetition of the word 'drowning" reflect the terrible effects gas had on the body and further heightens the terror of the situation and the helplessness all the men must have felt. The echo in the opening lines of

"*Strange Meeting*" is also noteworthy in regard to the ugliness of War:

"It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound long tunnel, long since
Scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned
.... But mocks the mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something has been left
Which must die now, I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity of war distilled...."

(*CP*, ll. 1-6, 24-29)

The poet here beautifully elaborates the horror of War. This harrowing and prophetic poem is also remarkable technically for its use of assonance, or para-rhyme to increase the effect of half-reality, half dream that pervades through it. Owen used assonance in a number of other poems but nowhere more tellingly like this. "Strange Meeting" is his final word on the social responsibilities of the "true poet"; but even in his statement, where the "truth untold" is seen as the pity-"the

pity of war distilled". This poem indicates the highest poetic imagination.

Though Owen's speakers often use images of inundation and water, the "swim" they take through the war is anything but purifying. Soldier's desire for clarity and invigoration are met only with insanity and exhaustion. Instead of gaining a 'sharpened power", they become "drunk with fatigue" as they march through "sludge" (*Dulce Et Decorum Est*"). Instead of gaining a "hand made sure", their hands grow "Reckless with ague" under the "torture of lying machinally shelled" ("S.I.W.") instead of gaining a "clear eye", their "eyeballs shrink tormented/Back into their brains, because on their sense/sunlight seems a blood- smear"("Mental Case").

The poems "*The Show*", "*Arms and the Boy*", and "*Insensibility*" illustrate Owen's unusually wide range of visualization as well as the unity of imaginative perception behind it. Owen's poems are photographic presentation of the War. "*The Show*" presents a terrible panorama of the battlefields. We can see below a landscape like an evil dream, a scene of sadness, desolation and horror:

"My soul looked down from a vague height with Death,

As unremembering how I rose or why,

And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,

Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,

And pitted with great pocks and scabs of plagues."

(*CP*,ll. 4-8)

When Owen writes of the physical effects of the war on human beings, much of his imagery deals with the parts of the body. These lines show that men have become loathsome caterpillars, writhing and dying amid the scabrous landscape. Certainly Owens's war poems feature most of the traits like; masculinity, sparseness, anti-individualism, impersonality and so on. However, the subject matter- the horrors of the First World War – is what characterizes Owen's style and is undoubtedly the driving force behind his emergence as a strong and original war poet. Owen's war experiences freed him from the strictures of the derivative Romanticism that had influenced his earliest poetic efforts and gave him a subject to write about:

"In order to write about this new reality, the most successful war poets became 'modernists' in spite of themselves: their new diction increasingly drew near to the concrete imagery of

Pound and Eliot; they forsook the pre-war romanticized notion of the poet as a bard."[22] Above all, they recognized, in Owen's words, that a poet 'must be truthful. It was a quest for truth that prompted some of Owen's greatest work.

Like Sassoon, Owen also wrote in reaction to the view of the war which was being propagandized throughout England. Newspapers accounts of the War euphemistically handled the ever-rising casualty of human lives and did little reporting on the realities of the war. According to Bogacz:

"[T]he European war became an occasion of a crusade that saw the mobilization of an extraordinary language filled with abstract euphemistic spiritualized words and phrases under which were buried the realities of modern mechanized warfare. Articles and editorials with titles like 'renewal of youth', 'Glorious Baptism of Fire', 'war and Sacrifice',.....For those who employed such language there were no maimed or shell-shocked soldiers, only 'broken' heroes".[23] As the war dragged on, such archaic and euphemistic language seemed to many veterans of the trenches increasingly incongruous and even absurd: it added fuel to the growing rupture between those who fought on the Western Front and civilians in England. Such language inspired not only contempt but also anger on

the part of many returning soldiers; for it seemed to them that it deceived those at home about the nature of modern warfare.

Many of Owen's most famous war poems speak directly about the nature of the War in an effort to reveal the truth of what was happening to the civilian population of England. Paul Fusel asserts that Owen "had been a strikingly optimistic, cheerful young man, skilled in looking on the bright side and clever at rationalizing minor setbacks...with his first experiences in the trenches in the middle of January, 1917, everything changed".[24]

With his war poems, Owen was able to break with the traditions that had limited his poetry for so long. In doing so, he was not only able to speak truthfully in his poems, but also found a new poetic voice that belonged to him alone. His initial attempts at poetry consisted of mimicking both the style and content of the Romantics. He then dabbled in Decadence. According to Perkins, "England ... had a strong, rebellious avant-garde in the 1890s, and then next generation of English poets, whom we may loosely call Georgians, reacted against this and returned to more traditional modes".[25]

However, Owen had already learned from Sassoon that graphic and shocking imagery could be acceptable content for poetry. Owen seemed to have found his own poetic voice. His experiences in the war gave him the subject matter he needed in order to break from the traditions that had bound him. By the time Owen wrote his poems, he had already rejected the mode of poetry that was being practiced in England during the early years of the War. While some of his early Romantic characteristics linger on his later works, such as the use of nature imagery and keen recollection of visual and auditory details. Owen's War poems are new and different from the poetry that preceded them. He wrote about terrible and shocking topics. He spared no detail when he described the horrors he had witnessed and the realities of trench warfare. Every line he wrote stood out, every emotion was intense, and nearly every aspect of every poem drew attention to itself. In the words of J. Middleton Murry, in Owen's poems, "there is horror at its extreme point, but horror without hysteria, horror that has been so overcome that it can be communicated direct from the imagination to the imagination. Hence there is calm".[26]

Owen's poems are not disharmonious, and they continue to this day to be recognized for their poetic merit. Owen enabled people on the home front to experience the war. He showed them through images, sounds and the direct expression of emotion a side of the war that they had not seen before. Because of these qualities, the terseness, the directness, and the brutal honesty, Owen's poems, like those of many of his contemporaries' war poets; belong to the early Modernist mode. In just a handful of poems, he captured the images and horrors of the Great War for all times and generations to come.

The present study is not and at simply to establish Owen's merit as a poet- his talent is undeniable. Instead here the concern is Owen's poetic development and transformation to show that he and his war poems fall into the truer form of literature. Though his earlier poems were inspired by Keats and other Romantics, his later war poems changed as Owen experienced the Great War. Tailhade and the Decadents introduced him to poetry filled with dark, sensual imagery during his stay in France. Subsequently he was dragged into the world of the army in 1914, where he encountered a new aspect before shipping out to the trenches in France. After this event and his full involvement with the war Owen's poetry

became truly realistic in its approach and theme. He presented the war subject to the world in a shocking, harsh, terse, and truthful manner. Owen spoke out against the propaganda. He broke himself from the tradition of poetry that insisted upon 'beautiful and agreeable' subject matter. Most importantly, however, Owen found his own poetic subject in the process.

Owen's poetry as well as the diversity of his poetic influences, seems to have been inevitability for the young poet. His own personality and character were just as varied. Hibberd, in the introduction to Owen's biography, provides a colourful description of Owen, the man the poet, "He lived his life to full: everything interested him, and he was never bored. He had a wicked sense of humour, an ironic eye for social pretension and an ear for comic voices. He loved words and language; even if he had written no poems he would deserve to be remembered as one of the finest letter writers of his century"...[27] He knew that his capacity for pleasure made him vulnerable to pain, and he experienced both, making poetry out of them with enormous skill and language. The endearing, sometimes pretentious young versifier, self-absorbed, class conscious and pedantic, grew into a fiercely compassionate,

deeply impressive man. His achievement intensifies to the enduring strength of poetry and of human spirit.

Wilfred Owen as, son, brother, soldier, friend, and specially as a poet- contributed significantly to English Poetry. His War poems not only spoke to the populace of his own generation about the horrible realities of the First World War, but have remained as a record for all future generations. In Owen's poems, the tragedies, the horrors, and, sometimes, the hopes of the Great War live on. Had Owen survived the war, it is unclear where his path would have led him to. Some critics have argued that, in Owen's case, the subject matter made the poet. Sadly, Owen never had the chance to prove otherwise. What poetry did he write, however, continues to draw attention and acclaim for both its skillful artistic features and its dramatic presentation of First World War.

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CHAPTER – III

SIEGFRIED LORRAINE SASSOON

(1886- 1967)

Siegfried Lorraine Sassoon was born on 8 September 1886 in Kent. He received his education at Marlborough and Clare College Cambridge. Sassoon, a poet, novelist, autobiographer and editor wrote also under the pseudonyms Saul Kain, Pinchbeck Lyre and S.S. He is one of the eminent war poets who wrote about their experiences as combating poets in the World War I. After joining the war he became a trooper in C Squadron, 1st Battalion, Sussex Yeomanry, and the Royal Sussex Regiment. He was sent to France. Soon he made a distinguished place as a courageous and adventurous soldier. Although he is best known for his war poems, he has also written poems on the subjects like English countryside as a source of contemplating human spirituality and existence. Due to his courage and fighting spirit on the trenches he was nicknamed "Mad Jack" by fellow combatants. He was awarded the Military Cross for his frontline achievements as well. Sassoon was wounded many a time during fighting. While

spending the days of recuperating in England he came to know active anti-war individuals of the time. This sort of contacts ignited a sense of protest in him against the continuation of the going on War. He threw away his Military Cross and wrote a letter to his Military establishment that was, as he put it, a "willful defiance of military authority".[1]

Though Sassoon's name is synonymous with protest against the catastrophe on the trenches during the First World War. His war poems deal with acquiescence and resentment as a whole. Sassoon presents a world view of patriotism and vivid and harsh realities of the frontline life. He became a spokesperson dutifully speaking of the meaninglessness of the war. At the advent of the war he was a young man of about 28 years of age. When the war was declared on 4 August 1914 he went off to war without being aware of the consequences which lay ahead. He headed for a cause he did not know its nature consciously or unconsciously. But the existing situations at the initial stages led him onto a belief that he was fighting for a just and noble cause for the nation. At the same time he was also under the spell of fear and fascination. Being a very sensitive man he could very soon anticipated the unpleasant situation likely to happen at the beginning of the

war. And it is this sense of confusion and intellectual disillusionment which shaped the rest of his war poems. There is no denying the fact that his war poems could not find immediate acceptance among the literary circles, perhaps because of the bitter tone and the whirlpool of his emotional outbursts. Despite the brutal and vivid sense of reality, however, the present study will look into his war poems as the chronicles of the time.

His early poetry is known for its Georgian touch emphasizing Romantic elements over reason and realism. The collection entitled *"The Old Huntsman and Other Poems"* was published in 1917(during the World War I). The title poem and a number of other poems of this series reflect pastoral life and temper in pre-war England. *Like* other Georgians Sassoon celebrates the natural beauty of the countryside in this phase of his poetic works. His most accomplished piece of work of this period is *"The Daffodil Murderer'*, a long blank-verse monologue that parodies John Masefield's *"The Everlasting Mercy"*.

In his *"The Old Huntsman and Other Poems"* Sassoon deals with a variety of subjects from autobiographical aspect, superannuation and disheartened huntsman to the naked realities of war. Here he also included many of his pastoral

compositions and early lyrics about his youthful experience. This collection of poems is progressive in its nature and content; starting from a 'happy warrior', to the confused soldier and angry young poet of 1916".[2] The poems of this collection impresses the readers by the sense of his poetic maturity. Here he is very sharp and perceptive in his tone and approach. There is a recognition of authenticity of the war poems which, he expressed; "I wrote in a period of rapt afflatus".[3]

His second comprehensive collection "*Counter Attack and Other Poems*" is in the similar tone and approach. The title poem of this series is the most graphic account of the war's catastrophe. As Bernard Bergonzi states in *Heroes Twilight,* Sassoon presents the dreadful aspects of the war and its effects "as a means of forcibly impressing on the civilian world some notion of the realities of front-line life".[4] Sassoon stated in similar terms that his war poems are "deliberately written to disturb complacency".[5] The undertones of the same ethical principle could be traced in his later volumes such as- "*Satirical Poems*", "*The Road to Ruin*" although his target of criticism here include politicians and the media in addition to the continued materialistic approach of the European nations

in the 1920s and 1930s. Sassoon's philosophical tone is evident in the collection *The Heart's Journey.* Where he raises questions about the meaning of life and the passage of time. Though by nature a man of firm determination, Sassoon at the advent of the war believed in the rightness of the cause for the nation. But this sense of patriotic exhilaration juxtaposes fear of death within his conscience.

Sassoon's war poetry is binary in its vision and approach depending on his experiences about war. It may be described as a phase of *acquiescence* and *resentment.* At the initial stage of his newly found adventure he earned a reputation as a courageous and brave fighter. In this regard a few poems in *The Old Huntsman* present the conventional heroic view of the battle with Sassoon advocating the righteous cause of his country. These poems deal with the glorious vision and optimistic exhilaration. Here we find Sassoon as a young enthusiast, full of patriotic feeling about his country. As in the first war poem "*Absolution*":

"The anguish of the earth absolves our eyes
Till beauty shines in all that we can see.
War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise,
And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.

Horror of wounds and anger at the foe,

And loss of things desired; all these must pass.

We are the happy legion, for we know

Time's but a golden wind that shakes the grass."

(*C P*,ll. 1-8)

The poet talks about his idealistic approach to war. The sentiments here portray him as a heroic warrior, self-forgetting laden with patriotic outlook and chivalric vision. He describes himself as the 'happy legion'. This early phase of his war attitude downplays the horror of war. At this juncture he is ready to accept all troubles and sufferings for a just and noble cause for the nation. This should be noted here that these sorts of patriotic sentiments were practised by a certain section of the society of the time, so Sassoon also became a part of this phenomenon. This poem is actually in Brookean style, celebrating the moral transformation brought about by the war as if he was waiting for this moment for years. He says, "fighting for our freedom, we are free". Sassoon here is of the view that war brings peace and 'freedom' from the monotony and the upheavals of common life. He wants a change because of failure on the other fronts of life so far. And that can be achieved, in his opinion, through war by sacrifice.

One thing that should be noted here is that "*Absolution*" was admittedly influenced by Brooke's famous sonnet sequence. As John H. Johnston has rightly pointed out that Sassoon in this poem "celebrates the moral transformation brought about by the war".[5]

What the poet experiences is a mixed bag of joy and confusion. He is found celebrating with his new found adventure on the one hand while on the other hand he is in a dilemma. Though he seems to be 'the happy legion' but the crux of the matter is 'Horror of wounds and anger at foe'. He is in a state of vacillation. In a footnote of this poem, written in later years, Sassoon says: 'People used to feel like this when they joined up in 1914 and 1915'.[6] The community which Sassoon comes from and a particular level of society voiced these sorts of attitude and sentiments. The heroic warrior, self-forgetting, attains the vision of the 'happy legion'. It was a powerful myth and a 'costly ideal'. This glorious vision of the soldier- poet is ready to absolve all the sufferings and pains that he goes through for the just and noble cause. But 'Horror of wounds', and 'anger at the foe' do take the poet in the state of dilemma. Nevertheless this makes him 'the happy legion'. At this stage of the war Sassoon visualizes the temper as traditional, and

the idealistic image of combat as a glorious and just undertaking.

Sassoon was very deeply affected by a phrase spoken by Major Campbell. It shook his inner self. About the enemy Major Campbell said: 'If you don't kill him he'll kill you...'[7] Hence war became an aggressive revenge for him at this juncture. As in "*The kiss*"-

"To these I turn, in these trust-
Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
To his blind power I make appeal,
I guard her beauty clean from rust,
...Sweet Sister, grant your soldier this:
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward darting kiss."

(*C P*,ll.1-4, &9-12)

This poem represents attitude of optimism and bravery. He is making loud voice in favour of the war. He wants an aggressive revenge on the enemy. He seems to be evocative at tonal level. He seems to be fully determined to guard the beauty and sanctity of his nation at any cost. He makes himself ready to foil any aggression to harm his country. The image provided in

the final line of the poem is worthy of consideration. His inner instinct is inciting and motivating. He tries to present himself as a loyal and respectful to the nation. This tone and mood is interesting in terms of its technicality. But in his later phase he is awfully away from this attitude and vision of his approach to War. This poem is very simple in its tone and approach but the undertones are full of energy. This attitude and approach authenticate his heroic outlook at the beginning. "*The Kiss*" devoted to the qualities of "*Brother Lead Sister Steel*", reflects the combative instincts of the aggressive young infantry officer..."[8]

The difference between the romantic view of war and the war he actually experienced on the Somme is a testimony of his progressive poetic attitude. When Sassoon began to write this sort of poems he had yet to come across the whirlpool of the terrible experience ahead. Within a year he would know that 'ecstasies changed to an ugly cry'.[9] The lists of casualties told their own grim story. The prolonging and destructive condition of the war was taking him into a world of gloom and despair that he hitherto didn't know.

In "*To Victory*" he says:

'I am not sad; only I long for lustre.
I am tired of the greys and browns and the leafless ash.
I would have hours that move like a glitter of dancers
Far from the angry guns that boom and flash".

(*CP*, ll. 9-12)

These utterances could be linked to his beginning of the annoyance with war. The poet here is exuberant and chivalric, disclosing the sentiments he longs for. He is in need of a new sort of things which could give him solace in these hours of moral and emotional crises. This moral crisis could also be seen in another stanza:

Return, musical, gay with blossom and fleetness,
Days when my sight shall be clear and my heart rejoice;
Come from the sea with breadth of approaching
brightness,
When the blithe wind laughs on the hills with uplifted
voice."

(*CP*, ll.13-16)

He is waiting for a new hope which could give him a new lease of life. He is fed up with the monotony of the existing life and circumstances. He wants a new beginning which could take

him out of pain and sufferings. We can also see radiance of modern and mechanical life being negated here. This modernism and mechanical life have well been done away by T.S. Eliot and other poets and literati of the modern time.

'*To Victory*' is an exuberant expression of the need Sassoon was feeling for the resurgence of full colours and luster of spring. 'I'm tired of greys and browns and the leafless ash'. The spring will bring the victory of colour over the monochrome world of War. Much of the power of his idealistic voice is a composition of his periodic temper. He puts a stamp of approval on the war because he is overflowing with enthusiasm of heroic temper. He is fed up with the routine and monotonous life. He wants a change of schedule. He communicates his attitudes and emotions to accomplish unfulfilled desires. The poet's expression is in the character of building blocks of a warrior. The literary scholars are of the view that such poems of righteousness were written at the initial stages of the war. Most of these scholars are of the view that these poems must have been composed before Sassoon witnessed any real fighting. This valuable source of insight of glorification was gained from the early attitude to war taken up by him. He did not believe in any formal religion, however,

at this juncture he states, "My only religion was my vocation as a poet, and my resolve to do my duty bravely".[10]

This early outlook focuses over a glorious range of personal associations about the War. At the same time this poem also represents a complex sample of the society he belongs to. These lines are worthwhile to be read of a man's plain and innocent attitude in its wholeness. The poet is enchanted with the newly found uncertain human little world. He wants to come out of the monotony of life and takes this uphill adventure as a matter of excitement, hence a fight for the just cause. At this stage the poet is away from the broad view of vision which he later held. He is 'in the field where men must fight'. Here he deals with the conventional attitude of patriotism, loyalty to the nation in the on going situation. He senses loyalties – to country, self respect and morality that provided the cause to fight.

In "*Secret Music*" the poet says:-

"I keep such music in my brain
No din this side of death can quell;
Glory exulting over pain,
And beauty, garlanded in hell."

(CP,ll. 1-4)

He believes in England's cause and the sense of fighting for freedom. These lines convey the message of finding solace in pain and suffering. In spite of the fact that he is not afraid of death, the undertone is that of fear and confusion. In his early poems he releases image after image making a serial use of optimistic exhilaration, to make his point stronger:

"I have no need to pray
That fear may pass away;
I scorn the growl and rumble of the fight
That summons me from cool
Silence of marsh and pool
And yellow lilies islanded in light."

(*CP*, ll. 7-12)

The poet longs for securing and image of an infinite beauty illuminating his heart and mind. Although he does not have the peace and security within, what gives him solace is the temptation to satisfy his emotions of patriotism and glory. Through this type of poems we get a perception of his yearning for grace and glorification but fear of death embedded within.

Sassoon could not shake off the sentiment that he had felt as a man dedicated to death .... but the reality of war was a long

way off. The reality came closer when, in April 1915, he heard of the death of Rupert Brooke. His first thoughts were for Edward Marsh: 'I won't write anything about Rupert Brooke except that I know how much his loss means to you, (as indeed to us all)'.[11]

This emerging trend receives a blow soon after the gruesome battle of Somme. The bitter truth of the prolonging War defeats his glorious outlook. For the first fifteen months of the going on War Sassoon wrote in Brookean spirit and tone and then found his own voice. 'The Easter of 1915 the death of Brooke became for Sassoon one of those things deeply felt'.[12] On 5 December 1915 the Battalion was moved from Bethune and exchanged the field of Flanders for Picardy, Amiens and the valley of Somme. At this state of affair he was crossing the whirlpool of his emotions. The deteriorating condition of war was forcing him to take stock of the prevailing situation. At this juncture a change in his writings portrays a kind of attitudinal metamorphosis. He became morose, sullen and unfriendly to his own outlook. Thinks were beginning to shape themselves. A few days before leaving Bethune he writes: "my inner life is far more real than the hideous realism of this land of war-zone".[13] His experience of the front-line trenches and

the catastrophic effects of the war were still limited; but he was close enough to understand the depth of anguish, bravery and selflessness. As is clear from the following extract of his diary:

> "Men marching by, from after four, hideous, brutal faces, sullen, wretched... strange to see, among those hundreds of face I scanned, suddenly a vivid red haired youth with green eyes looking far away, sidelong- one clean face, among all the others brutalized... The last month have unsealed my eyes. I have lived well and truly since the war began, and has made my sacrifices: now I ask that the price be required for me..."[14]

His diary entries betray a distempered mind which engendered recklessness and bravado more than cool courage and bravery. He thought of tireless living on a knife-edge knowing that, despite all the sacrifice, the war was getting nowhere.

The battle of Somme and the heavy bombardment on the first day of the German lines resulted in the loss of almost 58,000 human casualties. In November, over 600,000 soldiers of the Allied troops were either dead or injured. They had forced the Germans to retreat five miles. Sassoon captured the trip of Carnoy in a poem entitled "*At Carnoy*":

"Dawn in the hollow there's the whole brigade
Camped in four groups: through twilight falling slow
I hear a sound of mouth organs, ill played,
And murmur of voices, gruff, confused, and low.
Crouched among thistle-tufts I've watched the glow
Of a blurred orange sunset flare and fade;
And I'm content. To-morrow we must go
To take some cursed Wood. O world God made!"

(*CP*,ll.1-8)

He was not involving in morbidity but affirming his acceptance of death at the price of believing that 'dying for one's native land was the most glorious thing one could possibly do'.[15] Sassoon thought that the best way to forget war was to be at the heart of it.

Sassoon was a good observer of the world around. He was consumed with a sense of futility. Whenever he thought of the future it deepened his depression. The constant chain of soldiers for dispatch to the frontline and men in uniform ready to fill the gaps in line fed his death-haunted memory. What he felt is that nothing was permanent than the need for more and more personnel as the news of losses came in. This situation takes Sassoon into the world of anti-climax. A suspicion got

rooted in his mind that their idealistic approach to war was not related to the front line reality. The increasing human loss War exacted became unsustainable to him. This suspicion of reality is one of the most powerful themes in his war poems. In *'Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting_Man"* Sassoon tells the story of troops lined up on the squares ready to set out and Padre's final words to them: 'And now may God go with you; I will go with you as far as the station'.[16]

The loss of human lives was so great, that any gains made appeared insignificant. The next year in the month of October, in a failed offensive, 15000 British soldiers were butchered. This slaughter was unbearable to a man of Sassoon's temperament. Rupert Hart-Davis states, 'the war changed Sassoon from a versifier into a poet'.[17] A conqueror has had to obey the command of a situation that arose. A person who joined the trench affair with the view of freedom and righteousness is now ready to accept the dictates of the bitter truth faced by the human beings at the time. The cruel situation of the trenches provided no escape from reality. Life behind the trenches was bad enough; in the trenches it was still worse. The stench of dead bodies was everywhere. The

change was quick and instantaneous. Sassoon speaks of it very seriously in his first front-line poem, "*The Redeemer*":

"Darkness: the rain sluiced down; the mire was deep;
It was past twelve on a mid-winter night,
When peaceful folk in beds lay snug asleep;
There, with much work to do before the light,
We lugged our clay-sucked boots as best we might
Along the trench; sometimes a bullet sang,
And droning shells burst with a hollow bang;
We were soaked, chilled and wretched, every one;
Darkness; the distant wink of a huge gun."

(*CP*, ll. 1-9)

And he further says in the same poem:

"He faced me, reeling in his weariness,
Shouldering his load of planks, so hard to bear.
I say that He was Christ, who wrought to bless
All groping things with freedom bright as air,
And with His mercy washed and made them fair.
Then the flame sank, and all grew black as pitch,
While we began to struggle along the ditch;
And someone flung his burden in the muck,
Mumbling: 'O Christ Almighty, now I'm stuck!"

(*CP*, ll. 28-36)

His poem "*The Redeemer*" is directed towards a party working with planks. These images of the trenches give the resemblance of one of his men. This man's both arms are supporting his heavy planks, to Christ at Golgotha. This powerful imagery of the real condition could be felt in the following lines "What I have written", he once recalled, "is what I have experienced".[18]

This realistic approach of Sassoon is often combined with biting satire as well. It is the war that polished his poetic career. Here he met Robert Graves. As the war prolonged, however, he came up as an awfully outspoken pacifist and the executive of some of the most violently satirical anti-war poems up to his time. Sassoon, during his period of service was wounded several times. For his courage and firm determination he was awarded Military Cross, which he later realised of no use and therefore he threw it away. He got inspired and motivated by Bertrand Russell and protested in "*A soldier's Declaration*" (July1917). He thought that the war was 'being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it'. This outspoken attitude brought about an issue of disciplinary action against him. But Robert Graves, a friend of Sassoon, made the Military Office believe not to take the

matter as a violation of the discipline. Hence this case was treated as a result of shell shock. The medical board therefore sent him to W.H.R. Rivers (A Military Hospital). Here at Craig Lockhart Hospital he met Wilfred Owen. Sassoon also edited Owens's poems in 1920. Sassoon's own anti-war poems were published in *The Old Huntsman* (1917) and *Counter Attack* (1918).

The war seemed to him less and less purposeful and he believed that it would go on for ever. As the devastation resulted in large losses of human lives, his anger triggered off in his psyche. The intensity of his resistance is not only realistic but also retaliates with greater poetic force. The grotesque reality of the frontline set in motion a reasonable opposition of intolerable coercion. The description of actual events exposed that ugly side of the war which the general public was ignorant. His aim was to enlighten them with the harsh and painful realities of the front-line. The catastrophic consequences of the war affected the conscience of the poet so much that an explosive poetic voice ultimately emerged. When the War prolonged and the state of victims of War further deteriorated, his poems voiced resistance. His sentimental

response to the inexorable forces of war provided tool to nourish his response.

After experiencing the naked truth of the ongoing war his attitude and outlook to war abruptly got changed. His poetry therefore, feature the minute and often grotesque details of the cruel trench conditions. Sassoon felt heartache and hence tries to portray the realistic photographic image of the actual conditions of the impact. His poems attack the brutality and destruction of war. Sassoon's description of the war and the soldier's lot achieve their effect by the block building horrors of their details, as in the poem "*Counter Attack*":

"A yawning soldier knelt against the bank,
Staring across the morning blear with fog;
He wondered when the Allemandes would get busy.
And then, of course, they started with five-nines
Traversing, such as fate, and never a deed.
Mute in the clamor of shells he watched them
Spouting dark earth and wire with gusts from hell,
While posturing giants dissolved in drifts of smoke.
He crouched and flinched, dizzy with galloping fear,
Sick for escape – loathing the strangled horror
And butchered, frantic gestures of the dead."

(*CP*, ll. 14-24)

The poems of this phase show an aspect of dreariness and inhumanity of the war. This poem exhibit war settings to communicate a powerful sense of horror. He places the scene of war within the context of horrific situation of the contemporary world. The ripening harvest under the August sun , the occasional wave from some stranger, as the train went by, even the familiar hoardings all came upon him 'With an irresistible delight' as he describes in "*Stretcher Case*":

"He woke; the clank and racket of the train
Kept time with angry throbbings in his brain.
Then for a while he lapsed and drowsed again.
At last he lifted his bewildered eyes
And blinked, and rolled them sidelong; hills and skies..."

(*CP*,ll. 1-5)

Further in the same poem he says:

"There shone the blue serene, the prosperous land,
Trees, cows and hedged; skipping these, he scanned
Large, friendly names, that change not with the year,
Lung Tonic, Mustard, Liver Pills and Beer."

(*CP*, ll. 21-24)

These lines are diagnostic in nature. The poet is conscious about the ills of the prevailing situations. He is apprehensive

and concerned with the sense of disaster that has overtaken. The idea here, is that a horrific effect of war is enormous. There is waste all around. These lines clearly convey the poet's state of mind to the reader.

Using the realistic details of the soldier's condition his poems express the sufferings and troubles faced by the common soldiers at the battlefield which is a gruesome reality. The poet is in the state of dilemma. He is stuck in a very difficult situation. Sassoon's strong feelings and minute observation of the War are because of a War that could be, in his opinion, brought to an end. He is of the view that both sides should realize the fact that they would gain nothing by prolonging this disaster. This demoralizing but brutal acts led him to the cross roads of total moral crisis. In this moment of psychological and moral crisis, he prepared the following statement:

"I am making this statement as an act of willful defiance of military authority because I believe that the war is deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. I am a soldier convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest . . . . I have seen and endured the sufferings of the

troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolong those sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust....(July 1917.S.Sassoon,Statement to Commanding Officer).[19]

This brave and defiant gesture is a testimony of the gruesome reality that he witnessed. He was content that his deepest feelings had so succinctly expressed. This statement was also for those with whom he had served and were dead.

In his poem "*To Any Dead Officer*", the last verse almost seems to echo this statement:

"Good-bye, old lad! Remember me to God,
And tell Him that our politicians swear
They won't give in till Prussian Rule's been trod
Under the heel of England... Are you there?...
Yes...and the War won't end for at least two years;
But we've got stacks of men... I'm blind with tears,
Staring into the dark. Cheero!
I wish they'd killed you in a decent show."

(*CP*, ll. 33-40)

The poet here criticizes the vanity of the political establishment. He is angry with the people who are responsible for this disaster. He is moved with the soldiers'

condition at the front. The undertone is full of anger and disillusionment

In the poem "*Attack*" he offers a prayer to stop the ongoing conflict:

"Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!"

(*CP*, ll. 9-13)

The poet is extremely disappointed by the condition of the horrifying damage done over there. He seems to be helpless and seeks help from Heaven. He is a helpless lot. The sensitive soul and mind of the poet is restless. In such a condition no human being could have remained unmoved. Certain details of the war and imagery presented in the poem deepen our understanding of the tragedy. Though such realistic details in poetry are objectionable but the purpose of the poet has been to familiarize us with the critical situation of human beings during the War. This bears universal dimensions in terms of time and spirituality. The device used reinforces the human predicament.

In spite of the realistic presentation of the scenario the significance of the human aspects can not be overlooked. As in *"Dreamers"* the predicament of the soldier's condition has been put pathetically on the grey land of death:

"Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land,
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.
In the great hour of destiny they stand,
Each with his fends, and jealousies and sorrows.
Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win
Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives."

(*CP*, ll. 1-6)

Here Sassoon presents one of the most graphic accounts of the war's catastrophe. In these photographic accounts we are left with no option but to acknowledge the significance of the human concerns in its content and intent. These graphic accounts are the brilliant juxtaposition of realism and satire. They are mocking in their manners and attitude 'no dividend from time's to-morrows' signify human sufferings. That is to say even after risking their lives they are at the receiving ends. Hence in return they are going to get troubles and pains at the end of the day.

It is an attempt to place on record and bring closer to our times how these soldiers were being coped with their sufferings. The uncertainty of the war further aggravated their sufferings. At the same time it reminds us of existentialist view of living as suffering. The poet is disheartened and tense about the shadowy conditions of the soldiers. The desire to narrate this sort of reality of the trenches reinforces the grotesque essentials of the struggle:

"He pushed another bag along the top,
Craning his body outward; then a flare
Gave one white glimpse of No Man's Land and wire;
And as he dropped his head the instant split
His startled life with lead, and all went out."

(*CP*, ll. 45-49)

It elaborates the human sufferings with factual descriptions. Certainly the soldiers are being thought of as the scapegoats. In a sense they are being mocked and taunted ironically as they have no chance to escape. The poet has excellently tried to reflect on the basic situation of their condition. They are in the awful situation and are being used as mechanical items. They face the incapacity to make sense of their lives:

"He was a young man with a meager wife
And two small children in a Midland town;
He showed their photographs to all his mates,
And they considered him a decent chap
Who did his work and hadn't much to say,
And always laughed at other people's jokes
Because he hadn't any of his own."

(*CP*, ll. 30-36)

This realism got overshadowed as the war prolonged. Increasing disaster of the trenches forced Sassoon to look back in anger in order to reinforce his point of view. The battle of Somme forced him to write satiric and ironic poems. Sassoon's new found satirical voice constituted elements of provoking opposition. He hated the war. He was unable to be tolerant about it. He became disgusted with those who accepted it with civilian bellicosity and self-defensive evasion of its realities. His conscience was falling him apart. It was taking him apart slowly and steadily. It was a tearing process. He could see no end to the slaughter. He shouted as loud as he could. His loathing of those who desired and conspired for the war to continue became the object of further satire. Now he took a position of an angry young poet railing against the

war in a satirical tone and approach. Now with the realities so crude and raw, the poet entered an unprecedented poetic phase. This phase of his poetry represent better satire. The poet could not digest the realty so cruel and therefore, spoke out against it satirically.

In his poem "*They*" he lampoons a bishop who praises the glorious mission which the soldiers were undertaking while ignoring the ugly wounds inflicted upon them by on going War. *"They"* is an awfully satirical poem in which Sassoon underpins the whirlpool of his disillusionment and anger:

"The Bishop tells us: when the boys come back
'They will not be the same; for they'll have fought
'In a just cause: they lead the last attack
'On Anti-Christ; their comrade's blood has bought
'New right to breed an honorable race,
They have challenged Death and dared him face to face."

(*CP*, ll. 1-6)

In this regard the next stanza of the poem is equally relevant:

"We're none of us the same!' The boys reply.
'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;

'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you will not find

'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.

And the Bishop said: The ways of God are strange."

(*CP*, ll. 7-12)

This poem represents a biting satire. Here he lampoons the Bishop who praises the glorious mission of the soldiers. The details in these lines are satiric and ironic in their tone and approach. The satirical approach of the poet directs and deepens the absurd conditions of human lives on the war front. At the same time Sassoon's war poems awfully represent varied combinations of his attitude.

In "*Stand-To-Good Friday Morning*", Sassoon presents a soldier's predicament who prays that should be wounded so that he can escape the war. The awful situation of the war forces the soldier to wish to depart from the scene of war in any way possible. So as to get a sense of satisfaction. One can visualize the imagery of a soldier brooding over hopes and despair regarding life's and death's uncertainties:

"They seemed happy; but I felt ill.

Deep in water I splashed my way

Up the trench to our bogged front line.

Rain had fallen the whole damned night.

O Jesus, send me a wound to-day

And I'll believe in your bread and wine,

And get my bloody old sins washed white!"

(*CP*, ll. 7-13)

In these lines a soldier tries to escape. The uncertainties are prevailing in his heart and mind regarding life's direction. He thinks that there is nothing certain in a soldier's life. He is disgusted and disturbed about his place in life. These uncertainties take him to the direction of wishing an interval between the two unsure aspects of his life. He wishes a wound which will bring at least temporary relief to his disturbances. He is fed up with the long and dreadful period of gloom and despair. He complains to the eternity and calls upon Jesus to rescue him from the existing painful condition.

This poem also presents a purely satirical situation. He is consciously unconscious of the nature of the war. So he shouts for help. He visualizes the future ahead. The poet satirizes the blindness and silence on part of the authority concerned who were paying no heed to the predicament of the soldiers. It's a satirical cry of the poet over tormented men and soldiers and innocent lives. It's a satire on the mute spectators in the corridors of power and establishment. His real crime

was that he was human being in 'that zone of inhuman havoc'. The common soldiers in his eyes had become the real hero of the war. As in, *"The General"*, the following lines are about one of the 'droves of victims' sacrificed by incompetent leaders:

'Good morning; good-morning! The General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with riffle and pack."

(Cp, ll. 1-6)

In this poem innocent soldiers are the victims not of the enemy, but of the 'incompetent swine' who organize and plan the battles. The colloquial tone, direct speech and everyday language enhance the poem's sense of reality. By naming Harry and Jack and using first person narrative, Sassoon individualizes the soldiers. While he distances us from authority with the use of the impersonal title "*The General*". His use of the inclusive 'we' reinforces our sense of distance between the troops and their officers. The poem is a damning indictment of a system that professes to value its soldiers while making no more than token gestures towards them. The

air of transience which permeated the depot strengthened human attachments and deepened their intensity. This intensified feeling and shared danger; the mutual involvement created bonds and released emotions which under other circumstances would have remained otherwise. This super realism unfolds the fundamental questions confronting freedom struggle and ultimate meaninglessness and triviality of the war at the cost of innumerable human lives and property as well. The paradoxical nature of the human condition explains the highest and extreme truth satirically. Sassoon understood now that his commitment was no longer to the war but to those whom he regarded as its living victims. They became his concern and a source of motivation.

In another poem "*Does It Matter?*" Sassoon once again downplays the physical damage done to the soldiers:

"'Do they matter? Those dreams from the pit?
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won't say that you're mad;
For they'll know you've fought for your country
And no one will worry a bit."

(*CP*, ll. 11- 15)

These lines explain the absurdity of the prevailing situation. The ironic approach to a soldier's life is justified rhetorically. This approach and tonal explanation throw light on the plight of a soldier's life. These poor fellows have been sand-witched between life and death. They have been trapped within. It is a kind of metaphysical anguish against the war. Everything in this context appears as a metaphor for the hope scarcely possible. Hope has been intercepted by despair and gloom.

The prolonging war provided a valuable source of insight to Sassoon in respect of satirical and ironic tone. In "*Prelude: The Troops*" he says:

"O my brave brown companions, when your souls
Flock silently away and the eyeless dead
Shame the wild beast of battle on the ridge,
Death will stand grieving in that field of war
Since your unvanquished hardihood is spent,
And through some moved Valhalla there will pass
Battalions and battalions, scarred from hell;
The unreturning army that was youth;
The legions who have suffered and are dust".

(*CP*, ll. 18-26)

After witnessing the dislocated and disjointed condition of the front life the poet is ironically disgusted. He projects a testimony of the disjointed real irony: 'shame the wild beast of battle on the ridge', and the legions who have suffered and are dust'. This poetic attitude portrays the temper of the mood which anguished and depressed the poet .This could be said an awfully powerful imagery juxtaposing the human sufferings.

Sassoon's poem *"Counter Attack"* presents the same ironic and satirical situation:

"The place was rotten with the dead...,
High- booted, sprawled and groveled along the saps,
And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled,
... And the rain began-The jolly old rain!"

(CP, ll. 7-13)

These lines portray the human lives thrown into a diseased world questioning the human values in general. The irony of the situation clearly suggests the state of human lives and the breakdown of human endeavour. The poet is only left with the option of transforming gruesome realities of trenches, for the

generations to come. The recurrent images of the front life and the dead bodies of the fellow soldiers knock at the gate of the senses and sensibilities of the poet indicating an increasing flow of anguish transformed into satire and irony. This anguish in its extreme form can also be seen in the following lines:

"The house is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
And cackle at the show, while prancing ranks
Of hariots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
'We're sure the Kaiser loves our dear old Tanks!"

(*CP*, ll. 1-4)

The poet satirizes the inhuman concerns of the Kaiser. It's a typical Sassoonian Satire making us realize the aristocratic mannerism, giving precedence to the things of interest and benefit. As we see here precedence is given to tanks over human beings. The lifeless objects are more important and matter of concern than a human being. Sassoon's accounts of life on the front must be taken in the larger context of the situation. He satirizes people having power of self interest. His disillusionment and repeated anguish assert his concerns. In "*Base Details*" he wrote about the professional Officer class who were safe from the real conflict, their self-indulgent

lifestyle lived out in the dinning-room of the hotel and commanding from there careless of their younger colleagues:

"If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath,
I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base,
And speed glum heroes up the line to death.
You'd see me with my puffy petulant face,
Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel,
Reading the Roll of Honor.' poor young chaps",
I'd say --- 'I used to know his father well;
Yes, we've lost heavily in this last scrap'.
And when the war is done and youth stone dead,
I'd toddle safely home and die in bed."

(*CP*, ll. 1-10)

This true account of the life on front increases the poet's interest relating to the larger issues concerned. The implied aim of the poet is to convey the hardships and problems faced by the soldiers in general. The miserable plight of the soldiers is not at all an issue in the eyes of the powerful and the people sitting in the flowery chair so far. Like Byron's *Don Juan,* Sassoon in "*Base Details*" anticipates the life of the front-line soldier and the "life at the base':

"Also the General Markow, Brigadier,

...All common fellows who might writhe and wince,

...His sympathy for rank, by the same token,

To teach him greater had his own leg broken".[20]

This assumption extends to the issue of inequality and social disparities existing in the society. According to the poet the soldiers are destined to suffer because they mortgage their destiny after they enlist to the profession. They have to obey the masters of their destiny. There is a clear distinction between the general masses and the people who enjoy power. One incident at the base is painfully recorded in a poem entitled *"Lamentations"*:

"And, all because his brother had gone west,

Raved at the bleeding war; his rampant grief

Moaned, shouted, and choked, while he was kneeling

Half-naked on the floor. In my belief

Such men have lost all patriotic feeling".

(*CP*, ll. 6- 10)

He is satirical due to the pitiable condition of the soldiers in general and disillusionment because of the continuation of the deadly war in particular. His satiric tone further exposes the

situation which is evident in the words like- 'Half-naked on the floor', 'Moaned', 'Shouted', 'Kneeling' etc. In a subtle and imperceptible manner his cogent attitude has outwitted his rhetoric. He further adds like a rhetorician a bizarre situation of the soldiers and the satiric reality of the frontline affairs.

The analysis of the War scenario with a glance at Sassoon's concern of the soldiers sufferings are transformed into a pure Sassonian critique of the complexities of the war. As we see in the "*Suicide in The Trenches':*

"You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go."

(*CP*, ll. 9-12)

The realities of the trenches have so intensified the anguish according to the poet that it has become a monster threat to human lives. The life of soldiers was uncertain that no body knew what might happen to him the next moment. Soldiers' life is compared to the sufferings in the hell. There is no laughter, only pain and sufferings. This threat of sufferings states his human concerns. He interrogates the nature of the

war in ironic mode. This ironic and satirical dimension provides the evidence of the tragedy involved. Though the satire is related with the predicament of the soldiers fighting on the front but its under-currents are visible in the society of the time as a whole.

A reading of Sassoon's War poetry suggests a multi-dimensional approach in which a variety of his attitude and experience supplement a definite meaning to conditions of human lives in general. The cry and attitude of resentment is so deep seated in his poems that it acquires pitiable and pathetic dimension. The continuing war is vital in the evolution of his deeper concerns and outbursts relating to human lives. All these reactions share dislike against the war. To Sassoon War is O.K., it is a means of human liberation and peace in the world. But when this adventure becomes aggression and suppression, it is intolerable and must be criticize.

Sassoon's war poems voice a discontentment with the existing affair as they were. The world of war seems to be a barren waste. He attempts to incite the reader into an awareness of moral and spiritual drought. Over all appeal of his war poems is to awake the barren heart and mind. His utterances are not

only subjective but also intellectually demanding in the sense that it speaks of the condition of human catastrophe. The insecurity, hardships, the vision that encompasses vast vistas of human endeavor. In fact Sassoon's war poems go beyond its time and age. His satirical and ironic attitudes are a kind of direct display of distrust with the existing society. His poems are the reminiscences of his experience of the accounts of a bleak period. The gist of his thrust is on the absurdity of the entire situation in the surroundings. The horror and disillusionment connect the meaninglessness and hollowness of the continuing war. His anger, satire and irony are rooted in the reality of the front life. What Sassoon felt is that the world, particularly England had gone mad in an orgy of inverted values.

He used similar approach in the volumes after war. Such as *"Satirical Poems"* and *'The Road to Ruin"* as well. His target includes political personalities and the media in these volumes. But at the same time a calm and quieter philosophical tone is evident in his poems. Another aspect of these volumes of the 1920s collections such as "*The Heart's Journey* " is the voice of his questions about the usefulness of being and the course of time so far. These metaphysical

aspects are generally co-related with his observations of nature and unfold the truth of his bond with the rural English landscape. In "*Sequence*" there is an approach to religious conviction; it mirrors the spiritual conversion that he undergoes in the 1950s.

In relation to his war poems Sassoon received mixed reactions from different literary quarters. The literary critic like H.W. Massingham says, Sassoon's poems are "epigrams- modern epigrams, thrown deliberately into the harsh, peremptory, colloquial kind of versification which we have so often mistaken for poetry..."[21]

But one of his great friends of the time, Wilfred Owen rightly approves Sassoon's treatment of combat, claiming that Sassoon's poems not only deal with war's immediate and startling aspects, they also exhibit a greater artistic approach. Wilfred Owen claims:

> "... I have just been reading Siegfried Sassoon and am feeling at a very high pitch of emotion. Nothing like his trench life sketches has ever been written or ever will be written. Shakespeare reads vapid after these. Not of course because Sassoon is a greater artist, but because of

the subjects, I mean. I think if I had the choice of making friends with Tennyson or with Sassoon, I should go to Sassoon..."[22]

In spite if its great human concerns Sassoon's anger in his War poems, invalidates his work aesthetically.His descriptions appeal to the senses instead of imagination. Sassoon's poems do not expand and intensify the horror of war into a greater human context. But rather enjoin the reader to react to the moment. In this context John Middleton Murry has correctly pointed out that:

"... Mr Sassoon's verses- they are not poetry – are such cry.*[Counter Attack and Other Poems*] They touch not our imagination, but our sense. Reading them, we feel , not as we do with true art, which is the evidence of a man's triumph over his experience..."[23]

Virginia Woolf is says that- "Mr Sassoon's poems are too much in the key of the gramophone at present, too fiercely suspicious of any comfort or compromise, to be read as poetry; but his contempt for palliative or subterfuge gives us the raw stuff of poetry..."[24] Virginia Woolf is of the opinion that Sassoon "deserted art in a compulsion to express the intolerable".

But there are critics who have found enough poetic merits in Sassoon's War poems. They are of the opinion that:

> "... The bitterness of Sassoon is the rage of disenchantment...He may not always have thought correctly, nor have recorded his impressions with proper circumspection, but his honesty must be respectfully acknowledged..."[25]

Sassoon's poems have also been appreciated as a chronicle of the time and age so far. It has been praised as a depiction of a generation's transformation from the pastoral simplicities of the past to the violent uncertainties of the age he lived in.

In recording the war atrocities and front life his satiric and ironic approach have been taken as an influential model for the artist in the later period of the twentieth century. As the fighting deepened Sassoon's highly sensitive nature began to feel the truth about soldier's life. Whatever sort of death and sufferings he witnessed around, he thought, it must to be recorded. In spite of the fact that he was a brave soldier his personal bravery did not stop him to let everyone know the continuing catastrophe, horror and tragedy of the war. The battle of Somme brought about a metamorphosis in his tone

and attitude. After that he began to write poems of bitter and satirical nature. C.E. Maguire in an essay "*Harmony Unheard*" (Published in Renascence, 1959) provided an overview of Sassoon's poetry, discussing major themes such as his musings on life and death, the absurdity of war and the course of time.

Notwithstanding Sassoon's use of realism, satire and straightforward outspoken Language in his efforts to wake the rusted soul up in favor of human endeavor is noteworthy. He made his intentions public to put the devastating and catastrophic effects of the inarticulate into words. He is of the view that it is the poet's duty to make leaders aware of the contemporary situation. In reply to John Gambil Nicholson's doubt about the war poems, Sassoon defended his war poems but also expressed his preferences for the "*Death Bed*", "*The Last Meetings*" and "*A Letter Home*", saying that "they have the best part of me in them, the quest for beauty and compassion and friendship".[26] These are lyrical war poems not satirical of the kind of which he is most generally known for. Undoubtedly some critics have criticized the war poems of Sassoon.

It should also be taken into account that these poems of War are not only the psychic "raw materials" but valuable ingredients of his poetry and also a well-cooked literary recipe. There is no denying of the fact that these poems are different sort of recipe cooked from the same range of ingredients. Sassoon talks about varied forms of destruction ranging from anthropocentric problems, environmental disaster and so on. He gets bitter and bitter as the war prolonged. According to him the war splits and dislocates the different phases and aspects of life. He has been burdened with a sense of disruptive waste of the on going war. He unfolds vividly the damage and disappearance of human lives on the trenches. And 'of nature red in tooth and claw'. His poems are based on human pathos.

Unlike Romanticists Sassoon places the greatest emphasis on the objective dimension of human experiences. By analogy his are the Platonic view of a mirror which faithfully reflects the existing reality. Precisely Keats also affirms the importance of the role of the imagination in the production of art. To Keats imagination is a surer guide to truth and reality than reason, and comprehends truth in the form of beauty. In a letter of Benjamin Baily Keats writes:

"I am certain of nothing but the holiness of heart's affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth... the imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he woke and found it truth".[27]

That is to say that in Sassoon's also, imagination and truth may well be associated with him. He too reflects the holiness of his heart's journey and documents the truth of his experiences of War. As John Silkin has aptly pointed out about Sassoon's attitude to War:

"...We are inclined to forget the ferocity of attack in the war poems of Sassoon ... he felt a sense of betrayal that could in no way justify the loss of one life. What is remarkable in Sassoon's poems is the cool way in which the dead in the state of decaying, are represented. The ' sodden buttocks' and 'clotted heads' are abruptly, and brilliantly , contrasted with the human living perception of something (ironically) non-human ... But the perception comes it is given an ironic turn-'the jolly old rain..."[28]

"Sassoon's contribution is his brilliant juxtaposition of savage, raw experience with elderly bewilderment. "*The Old Huntsman and Other Poems*" are also Sassoon's true utterance and they are supposed to be superior to the verse in the volume concerning England before the World War I. According to Mr. Heinemann who reviewed the poem in "*The Republic*" (dated 1918) " *The Old Huntsman* " is a boyish attempt to secure a quavering sporting reminiscence. "Haunted", "Goblin Revel" and "Night piece" show the kind of crow's nest of fantasy to which English poets were compelled to climb so long as they had no full community with the life about them and so passionate experiences of their own. "October" and "Morning Land" and " Arcady Unheeding" exhibit what a man with Mr. Sassoon's gift could do with classic opportunity.

These kinds of approach seem to be lovely but they are only forerunner of the true and realistic utterances which he finds in France. The war that he tries to portray his poetry is not an occasion for pomp and chivalry. The world of England is implicit in his singing without any doubt.

It is not the diplomatic war that motivates the poet but war that the human being really experienced, war the horrific means to a very politically ambitious end. The idea here is that

if he had remained in England he might have become a propagandist, a hate artist. His engagement with the army establishment carried his body and soul at the crossroads of his life. The poet is of the opinion that war opened the avenues towards death and destruction. Keeping in view this sort of death and destruction, he has not felt it necessary to apologize for his thoughts and approaches. He framed his experiences as they came to him. They are the bold and natural expressions of a person who has grabbed the right of freedom of speech through the poetic medium. The war has tested and tried his patience and emotions. This war provided him an opportunity to get himself lifted out of the traditional and old concerns, and landed him up with the associates not known to him. This war provided food and energy to Sassoon's eyes and ears. His senses have been taken into custody round the clock. His senses got imprisoned day and night, winter and summer. The wounded comrade , the Golgotha of the sentry, the harsh imperative at dawn, the music-hall banality, about the tanks , the blunt casualness of death-all these are building blocks for Sassoon to give way to a touch of immortality. And his liveliness, his salty wit polished his reception of realism without giving any artificial flavor. Nevertheless Sassoon

mastered the inner and outer life around him and breasted the war. The war showed him the monstrous and evil side. The flood of anger and disillusionment brought about relief to his hypersensitive soul and spirit. His loyalty, laughter, hatred-all are the outcome of this disillusionment.

It is primarily the destructive effects of war which enabled Sassoon to find his own way of anguish and anger to convey his message. He is like Prufrock (in Eliot's Alfred Song of John Prufrock) "to tell all" the image of the futility of war. He shows anger on the "buried human lives" which could have been saved to smile. His vision of unrest and dissatisfaction is well evident in his war poems. His exploitation of the panorama of war reality is impressive in the nature of the subject. The attempt to expose a panorama of human history as far as his conscience can reach, compels him to face the ultimate question about cause and effect of this dreadful human catastrophe. He could see, recognize and understand the darkness and futility resulting out of the confrontation.

The decayed body of the dying soldiers and its subsequent result is uncalled for. The dying soldiers on the front is combined with an allusion to Claudius' speech to Isabella about his approaching death in *Measure for Measure* by

William Shakespeare. Sassoon imagines soldiers' soul 'imprisoned in the viewless winds / And blown with restless violence round about / The pendent world (Act iii, sc.i)

Sassoon is anguished by the present catastrophic situation. The limitations of his perspective, however, have been criticized at various stages. His reliance with anger is the outcome of an emotion which telescoped the tragic and grotesque happenings on the trenches. It is Wordsworthian 'emotions recollected', evoked through the scenes of the trench tragedy. He is broken hearted because his speculations have been shattered. Due to reversal of his expectations, he takes up an attitude of anger and speaks of the plight corresponding to the existing conditions. Sassoon goes on adventure but shipwrecked and thrown up on the whirlpool of gloom and anger. This adventure to the trenches shows him the naked reality of the war and could not manage to withhold his confidence. His anger and bewilderment is a telescopic association with the human predicament. There is an implied disgust exposed in his war poems.

In his war poems the satire depends upon the absurdity of the gross condition of the soldiers' front life and human dimensions in general. What he reveals and strongly

persuades, is to fulfill moral and spiritual duties expressing his deep concerns for the human welfare. He is exhibiting a kind of protestant non-violence attitude. The significance of irony and satire in his poems should also be seen on the wider screen of moral and spiritual relevance. Christ represents, in Bible, as a sacrificial lamb whose blood cleans the sins of mankind. But here the blood bath is done only on the material ground. Hence this war is nothing to do with the salvation of humanity. His feelings are out of disgust and disillusionment, nevertheless, noteworthy. His response is sardonic:

He'd never seen so many dead before.'
They sprawled in yellow daylight while he swore
And gasped and lugged his everlasting load
Of bombs along what once had been a road.
How peaceful are the dead."

(*CP*, ll. 4-8)

His ironic subversion of anger and satire mourns the passing of young soldiers. This suggests human skeletal' between dry ribs'(whispers of immortality by Eliot). The words like 'dark clouds', 'morning burns', bullet through his brain' ... evoke powerful feelings of both terror and anguish.

In his approach there is an association between the mental and physical condition. He ridicules the polarization of meaningless war of attrition. The themes and motifs flow together and recur with a powerful sensitivity of his psyche. His powerful sensitive elements juxtapose a variety of human perspectives. His texts are the texts of reality.

Sassoon's method to apply experience and imaginative limitations of experience is noteworthy. It is this limitation of imagination which provides an opportunity of articulation of the plight of the whole uniformed warriors. He does not want this crude joke to be continued in the name of saviors. The anger and disgust imply the political, social, moral and other obvious factors which brought about this sense of attitude. Its an account of a brief survey of the political and moral spheres manufacturing hatred and effective divide among the haves and have-nots, powerful and general masses, rich and poor, right and might, the unrest culminated in the minds of the soldiers and so on and so forth. The poet has given masterly pictures of hate, disdain, revenge, remorse, despair, awe, mockery of the existing situations. His voices are Shellyean in nature and content. The satire and irony showered by him suggest that tyranny and sufferings should be condemned.

This perilous war of attrition has caused enough destruction. Enough is enough.

Sassoon's war poems express the trauma of the sufferings. He challenges patriotic and military humbug coloring the sensibility of an entire age in his War poems at the later phase of his poetic career. He witnessed the war as organized and motivated insanity. His War poems are a witness of the ugly truth that has ever seen. His war poems encourage a direct, colloquial vigor to reinforce the image of anger and disgust. He used realistic picture to shock readers. To a greater extent, after the war, his poems acquired ironic and satirical quality through an unsettled juxtaposition of the viewpoints. In general the destructive effect of the war not only brought about a great change in his attitude and outlook but also made red and blue to other combatants and non-combatants as well. Sassoon lacked in the variety of method and poetic imagination but excelled by exposing the naked reality.

Notwithstanding the poetic laxities, Sassoon's War poems should be acknowledged as a portrait of an age and a war torn generation plagued by unholy adventure. Hence these poems deserve a serious consideration. The portrayal of a war torn society and the sufferings of the uniformed provide a

comprehensive view of the period. Hopefully his war poems are certainly going to fascinate the readers of the English literature in all times to come. His war experiences are to be understood at its thematic level. It speaks about realistic and universal dimensions. The under current of these war poems are to bring about social, historical and moral changes in the outlook of the human society. These poems are suggesting important questions about the limitations placed upon common people by customary and institutional control.

The volume "*The Old Huntsman and Other Poems*" as a whole underscores his remarks, "My real biography is my poetry. All the sequence of my development is there"[29]

Sassoon's biting satirical commentaries are the realities of officialdom, physical conditions and patriotism. His poems are vivid and brutal in their sense of reality. Though his poetry could not find an immediately accepting audience but the bitter tone and the depth of feeling at the heart of Sassoon's poems are certainly going to make a place of its own in the minds of the literary readers.

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CHAPTER – IV

Rupert Chawner Brooke

(1887-1915)

&

Charles Hamilton Sorley

(1895-1915)

One of the three brothers, Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915) was born in Rugby, England, where his father served as a school master at Rugby School, which he attended. In 1911 he published Poems which was regarded even by his detractors as a herald of a major talent. Brooke suffered an emotional breakdown in 1912, following failure in his love affair. He embarked up on a trip to North America and the South Pacific in 1913. After the outbreak of the First World War, he returned to England and received a commission in the Royal Navy. While preparing for the assault on Gallipoli, Turkey, Brooke died of blood poisoning aboard ship in the Aegean Sea. He was buried in an olive grove on the Island of Scyros.

An English poet, critic, a scholar and an athlete, Brooke was considered first a Georgian and then a War poet. He was as famous for his charm and good looks as for his poetry. Yeats called him "the handsomest man in England"[1]. The Decadents

were an important early influence on Brooke which he, in due course of time shed for the metaphysical poets, especially Donne. Brooke's poetry is light, witty and sometimes sentimental, often lyrical. In his later works he experimented with poetic realism, as is illustrated in the Poems of daily life with common speech patterns. It was at King's College, Cambridge, that Brooke established a large circle of literary friends. Here, he had, such notable personalities as Virginia Woolf, Walter de la Mare, Edward Marsh, Henry James and Winston Churchill. 'The rural Old Vicarage at Granchester', which Brooke temporarily made his home, provided inspiration for a major poem of the same title and became the central meeting place for literary discussions. An impact of these literary discussions paid dividend in the form of his famous War sonnets.

His poetry was published in *Poems (1911*); *1914 and Other Poems (1915); and Collected Poems (1918).* His only critical work, *John Webster and Elizabethan Drama (1916),* evinces his critical insight into the dramatist of the period. *Letters from America (1916)* is his another prose work.

At its best Brooke's War sonnet sequence has been influenced by the onset of the World War I. He completed his famous

1914' sonnets during the early stages of the War, demonstrating in them a romantic, crusading vision typical of the English civilian spirit at that time. Brooke is usually considered typical of the early group of war poets. His War poems consisting of the famous five Sonnets appeared first in the fourth and final issue of *New Numbers (December 1914).*

In the *Preface* to his *1943 Anthology of War Poems* Robert Nichols comments about Brooke's sonnet sequence that of "sensation of being gathered up and lifted... as an opportunity to accept a rare moral Challenge."[2] Rupert Brooke's sonnets are full of that sensation of being gathered up. They are wonderful works of art. His sonnets are elegant, melodious, and rich in texture. *1914 sonnets* not only deal with the war, they also reveal a sophisticated sensibility meditating itself on the verge of War. This work in fact was inspired by a great moral, intellectual and social crisis.

In sonnet I, *"Peace",* the poet is gracefully thankful to the War, for the moral challenge it had posed. This challenge, however, is not in co-ordination with the external wrong to be righted but due to the opportunity for personal and moral enlistment, as it is clear from the following lines:

"Now, God be thanked who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honor could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!"

(CP, ll.1-8)

The poet rejoices in his escape from a world 'grown old and cold and weary'. He wants an escape from a malaise of the ills of the time he lived in. The sestet leads to a comfortable emotional paradox. According to the poet, pain and sufferings of warfare could bring a spiritual and emotional 'peace"; in battle, "the worst friend and enemy is but Death". The lines quoted above contrasts the inadequacies of poetry and love with 'swimmers into cleanness leaping' and a consequent 'release'. The poet thinks that only the body will be destroyed. The undercurrent Brookean tendency of self-warriorship is in search of a confluence where an exquisite meeting of beauty and death could be possible. These lines also suggest a kind of personal disillusionment. There is a juxtaposition of

dramatizing vague moral contrast. On the one hand, the poet goes through a moral crisis, on the other hand, he realizes that death is only a refuge he can get into. He wants release from a life he is not satisfied with. It's a kind of brokering peace through escape. He is an isolated person in his own world. There is a kind of internal whirlpool at the back of his mind. He tries to explore a variety of ways illustrating the futility and meaninglessness of the existing life.

Sonnet II, *"Safety"* with its echo of Donne's *"The Anniversarie"*, is also developed in terms of a paradox; the moral crusade, by its very nobility, gives assurance of a kind of spiritual safety and realization of immortality. In this poem images change with the changes of the mood. There is a sacrificial urge emerging out of passion for a meaningful life:

"We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's Endeavour;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all."

(CP,ll.10-14)

War or death 'knows no power'. One will be 'safe' whatever happens. 'And if these poor limbs die, safest of all'. 'Poor' registers both Brooke's emotional self-involvement and recognition of the body's inadequacy. The war is viewed in terms of its personal effects on the poet. Besides its personal touch they explore and evoke a feeling of emotive and imaginative triumphs. There is an implication of a way of transition from physical monotonous life to a retrospective awareness. With such sort of implying relevance to eternity he becomes an everlasting embodiment of self-sacrificing idealism. It is in the nature of the War which provides a kind of moral regeneration for those who longs to volunteer to fight it. As John H. Johnston rightly puts, "the nature and the purpose of the struggle remain undefined: they exist as vast unspoken premises behind the rhetoric of self-revelation and the artful shifts of paradox. The attitude of world-weariness, the suggestion of personal disillusion in love, and the hint of past "shame".[3]

"The Dead" (III) celebrates 'honor', but remains typical in 'the rich dead' who 'poured out the red sweet wine of youth'. Youth's sacrifice is more than patriotism, it is called 'holiness', it is a thing in itself, youth's perfect hour. This poem is

concerned with the implications of death. This poetic conception involves a number of elements; the pathos of terminated and unfulfilled hopes and joys. This sonnet considers the selfless generosity of the young men who have fallen in the battle:

"These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality."

(CP,ll.4-8)

The inspirational effect of these sacrifices on the living, and the assurance that death in the battle procures is a matter of remote contemplation. The poet is meditating on his own possible death. It gives him the cumulative emotional substance of these themes in an explicit personal application. Brooke is intellectually imaginative and possesses, in a rare degree, with a sense of sacrifice. His preoccupation with the actual experiences is vital. He is adventurous, daring, keen and his curiosity and interest in ideas are remarkable. Walter de la Mare beautifully sums up this approach in the following words:

"His writing... is itself a kind of action; and he delights far more than the mystics' in things touched, smelt and tasted. He delights, that is, in things in themselves not merely for their beauty or for the unseen reality they represent. He is restless, enquiring, veers in the wind like a golden weather cock..."[4]

Though the emotions that his War sonnets express are not of those of a combatant but they belong to a particular emotive overflow of powerful feelings consequently in tune with the current moment. Brooke never got into the self-glorifying stage, because he did not get to the War.

The fourth sonnet also called "*The Dead*", remembers how they (the dead) had known the varied sense- impressions of earth:

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
Washed marvelously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colors of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly freinded;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is
Ended."

(*CP*,ll.1-9)

These lines also deal with the implications of a way of transition from physical meaninglessness of life to a retrospective consciousness as "a pulse in the eternal mind". Sassoon's conceptions involve a number of vital elements; the pathos of unfulfilled desire, of hope and joy. This inspirational effect of sacrifices assures that death in the battlefield obtains eternal peace to his longing soul.

In "*The Soldier*", which is the fifth in the sonnet sequence, Brooke concentrates on his body, made by England, after dying in a foreign land, where there shall be 'in that rich earth a richer dust concealed'. 'The heart' (i.e. mind or spirit) will preserve the sounds and scents of its earthly experience. The impressions are both physical and eternal:

If I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam.
A body of England's breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

(*CP*, ll.1-8)

In these lines Brooke anticipates his own possible death. It is an effort on the poet's part to collect a larger emotional substance for personal agenda. He speaks in person, dramatizing the pathos of his own expected death. This poem cinematographically portrays the country to which he loved so much. The 'pastoral beauty' 'certainty' and 'quite kind' image has fascinated him. Here he tries to get a basis for him to be sacrificed. Brooke establishes a relationship between self and the values of the world around.

Charles Hamilton Sorley, a fellow soldier, refused to accept this proclamation. Sorley's observation about Brooke in this regard is, "that last sonnet sequence of his war sonnets which has been so praised I find (with exception of that beginning 'these hearts were woven of human joys and cares'..., *The Dead* (IV) over praised. He is far too obsessed with his own sacrifice, regarding the going to war of himself(and others) as a highly intense, remarkable and sacrificial exploit, whereas it is merely the conduct, demand of him (and others) by the turn of circumstances, where non-compliance with his demand would have made life intolerable. It was not that 'they' gave up anything of that list he gives in one sonnet: but that the essence of these things had been endangered by

circumstances over which he had no control, and he must fight to recapture them. He has clothed his attitude in fine words; but he has taken the sentimental attitude".[5]

C. Wilson Knight (essay dated 1971) is of the opinion that, "Brooke was a War poet for only the length of those last five War sonnets, until then, through nearly a hundred poems he had been a lyric poet of youth, love and Death, who developed from a late Decadent to an early Georgian...his poetry sounds the way the poetry should sound..."[6]

The *Poems of 1911 also* confirm this. For example, the following lines from the poem entitled "Sonnet:

Oh! Death will find me, long before I tire
Of Watching you; and swing me suddenly
Into the shade of loneliness and mire
Of the last land! There waiting patiently,
One day I think, I'll feel a cool wind blowing,
See a slow light across the Stygian tide,
And hear the Dead about me stir, unknowing,
And tremble. And *I* shall know that you have died."

(*CP*, ll.1-8)

The theme of Death is the most favourite subject of Brooke's poetry. A list of favourite attitude regarding words and gestures could be made that would constitute Brooke's sense of what was poetic. This idea turn up again and again , rearranged, dream and gleam, heart , tears, sorrow, grey, yearning, and weary cries and sighs and of course everywhere Love and Death. He seems to be an ambassador of a gloomy life.

In *"Fragment"* 'gay machine of splendor' contemplates the predicament of the frontline soldiers. The words like , 'lamplight', 'color shadows' and 'strange ghosts' give powerful ironic touch to the prevailing foreseen situations. 'Dawn' and 'Death' are recurrent features of his War and non-War poems as well.

Poems like- *"In Memory'*, *"Waikiki"*, *"The Funeral of Youth"*, *"Dust"* and in many other non-war poems 'dawn' and 'death' interplay the poet's gloomy temperament. In *"Retrospect"*, 'street at night', 'dark clouds', 'a moonless sky' convey the same message:

'O heaven without wave or tad

Silence, in which all songs have died!

Holy book, where hearts are still!

And home at length under the hill!

O mother-quite, breasts of peace,

Where love itself would faint and cease!

O infinite deep I never knew,

I would come back, come back to you,

Find you, as a pool! Unstirred,

Kneel down by you, and never a word,

Lay my head, and nothing said,

In your hands, ungarlanded;

And a long watch you would keep;

And I should sleep, and I should sleep!"

(*CP*, ll.27-40)

These lines represent an element of world-weariness and certainly a touch of death-wish. There is a blending of romanticism and irony. There is an impression of the anxiety as well. Brooke painfully attempts to peer into the hereafter. The poet passes from one image to another, like a man who is hunting for a match in a dark room. He conjures up horrible pictures. He has also a pre-conceived notion of endless bliss. He loves the existing world passionately. "Life on the earth is to him like first love, which he knows will be followed by other loves, but will never be repeated".[7]

Brooke greeted War with enthusiasm because it was an affair of a righteous cause for him. As a result of his early and untimely death and unfulfilled literary promise he became a symbol of the talented youth killed in the war. His War writings express the initial stages of patriotism. He tuned in the later generation of the War poets to show their anger and disillusionment. His death, his personal attraction and the charm of his verse made him a symbol of all the gifted youth killed in the First World War.

So far as his War poems are concerned they are imperative and about a man who is always contemplating about his possible eternity. He is like Tennyson's visionary troopers:

"Theirs not to reason why
Theirs but to do and die".

According to Brooke War is not only a noble act but also a means of release from the cruel world. His attitude towards War shows a kind of triumphant outlook. He seems to be an embodiment of bravery and sacrifice. Brooke is of the view that it is life that is tragic and painful. He thinks that a man could triumph life by dying bravely. His matrimonial gesture with love, suffering, life and death, pity and excitement are some of

the remarkable aspects of his poetry in general. He wants a release from the personal difficulties. Brooke's sentimentality takes us in to a whirlpool which he goes through. He planned to shake the world by being energetic and brave. He dreamed of a vision settling his feet upon an arduous task.

Brooke's poems are sometimes hysterical, exhibiting self-pity and emotional outburst. But there is also power and conviction inthem. His imagination comes directly into contact with the reality he realized. His language is the most abiding force of his poetic imagination. In retrospect he realises the facts of life. His depiction is about an extreme situation. Brooke in his poems constitutes a conflict between desire and reality, and reason and instinct. His individuality continues to struggle to attain eternity. Almost all of his War and non-war poems are the remembrance of the things past, present and future. The thinking of the past, the present and the future all shake on his existence depriving him of any peace. The fragmented preoccupation with reality and its impact continued to interest him. He is always pre-occupied with the vision of 'meeting with eternity'. He is a natural poet of a class whose natural way of spokesmanship is to get sacrificed and become immortal.

Brooke's temperament is not hypersensitive. He does not dare to face the ferocious assault. His sacrificial undercurrent makes him passive. He lives on the razor edge of his sense of eternity. Notwithstanding the criticism of his poetry, it could also be taken into consideration that he was not really free to choose attitude. Because he was on the sharp edge of the Georgian era. The extraordinary tuned music and lyricism of his poetry constitutes technical achievement. Elegantly employed symbol reflects his technical poetic maturity in implying death.

Brooke's poetry is mostly inspired by his passionate patriotic feeling for his country England. He is a victim of a continuous depression with life. He seems to be extremely serious person always meditating on issues like- love, history and death. A pathological examination of his poetry reveals that Brooke is always preoccupied with issues concerning humanity. He is greatly engaged with social and moral crisis. His poetry is an assertion of a realization of his dream he was longing for. He is overwhelmed by the unknown potential for good. Brooke is in search of liberation from chaos and uncertainty to a complete harmony. After the death of Rupert Brooke Winston Churchill said:

"... During the last few months of his life, months of preparation in gallant comradeship and open air, the poet-soldier told with all the simple force of genius the sorrow of youth about to die, and the sure triumphant consolations of a sincere and valiant sprit. He expected to die: he was willing to die for the dear England whose beauty and majesty he knew: and he advanced towards the brink in perfect serenity, with absolute conviction of the rightness of his country's cause and a heart devoid of hate for fellow-men..."[8]

Brooke shows his poetic strength by combining satire and tenderness. His poetry resumes every spiritual attitude of humanity towards history-- a destruction of all ideals and a final renaissance of wonder. For Brooke War was not altogether an evil; instead: "it cleans and purifies: it invigorates".[9] Brooke's War sonnets are fluent, skilful. They hit exactly the right note of love for his country and patriotic self-sacrifice for a noble cause. It is important, however, to emphasise that his pre-war poetry is in striking contrast to the mood of the *1914 Sonnets*. After the disillusionment of the later course of the War, which was so vividly expressed by Sassoon and Owen. We are all too painfully aware of rhetoric

and a strain of sentimentality exemplified in the last six lines of "*The Dead*' (III):

"Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There is none of those so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying has made us rarer gifts than gold..."

(*CP*,ll.1-3)

G. Wilson Knight (essay date 1971) says:

"Though thoughts to which he expresses in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward into this,.. They are a whole history and revelation of Rupert Brooke himself. Joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, ruled by high undoubting purpose, he was all that one would wish England's noblest sons to be in days when no sacrifice but the most precious is acceptable, and the most precious is that which is most freely offered".[10]

Brooke's sonnets are important the way the story of his life and death becomes an obituary of a class and a generation that was destroyed in the War. G. Wilson Knight further says:

"...The more we know about Brooke, and the more carefully we read his poems, the more he will be diminished as an important literary figure, and as a hero. And this is only proper: he has been Apollo too long. But myths are rarely killed by facts..."[11]

Though Brooke's poetry faced a criticism which is harsh, demanding, and unfriendly in its nature particularly suspicious about the qualities for which his poetry is best known. Nevertheless against all criticism here lies the fact that Brooke's poetry is delightful and soothing to the readers' heart and mind. In spite of the fact of Brooke's ability to survive among the standard poets is bleak, among the critics, his prominence in the poetic world is still acceptable. People like to read Brooke. In my opinion he has that vigor 'of the poetic flavor' to be established in the literary heritage.

What Brooke had to say he said with a conviction and moral earnestness, which commanded immediate attention. As technical achievements, five War sonnets which make up the sequence are noteworthy. The popularity of Brooke's War sonnets of 1914 sequence is accounted for by the fact that through it Brooke expressed the temper of the contemporary situation.

This is also the fact that the great poet is more than the voice of his generation; he is a prophet as well. Indeed, many of the greatest poets have been in revolt against their time. But Rupert Brooke proclaims the simple nationalistic faith of his own day, nicely expressed in the concluding sonnet sequence:-

"If I should die think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England."

(*CP*,ll.1-3)

It is true that traditionally conventional patriotism has largely ceased to be an inspirational force. But it is not fair to acknowledge that none of Brooke's sonnets of the sequence has meaning beyond its own time. For example '*The Dead*" has little relation to any particular time or place Brooke developed spirituality to the point where he is able to accept without fear or regret the fact of death. He finds in death a beauty surpassing anything that he has found in life.

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Charles Hamilton Sorley was born on 19 May, 1895 in Aberdeen, Scotland. He was the son of William Ritchie Sorley. He was educated, like Sassoon, at Marlborough College (1908-13). At Marlborough College Sorley's favorite pursuit was cross-country running in the rain, a theme evident in many of his pre-war poems, including "*Rain*" and "*The Song of the Ungirt Runners*". Before taking up a scholarship to study at University College, Oxford, Sorley studied in Schwerin, Germany, until the outbreak of the First World War. Later Sorley returned to England and volunteered for military service, joining the Suffolk Regiment. He arrived at the Western Front in France as a lieutenant in May in 1915, and quickly rose to the rank of Captain at the age of only twenty. Sorley was killed in action, shot in the head by a sniper, at the battle of Loos on October 13, 1915.

Sorley was also an early poet of the Great War. His poetry is of a very different style from Brooke's. As a matter of fact Sorley

was very much critical of Brooke's *1914 sonnets*. He claimed that Brooke was over-praised and obsessed with his own sacrifice. Sorley was primarily influenced by Goethe, Hardy, Ibsen and Homer. Nevertheless he was critical of the late Victorians:

> "The voice of our poets and men of letters is finally trained and sweet to hear; it seems with sharp saws and rich sentiment: it is a marvel of delicate technique: it pleases, it flatters, it charms, it soothes: it is a living lie."[1]

He was also critical of some of Hardy's more "public" poetry, but praised *The Dynasts* for its honesty and truth to events and human nature. According to Robert Giddings 'It was his attachment to German Culture that made it easy for him to distrust the shallow British patriotism which greeted the start of the War".[2] But at the same time, he was astonished and distressed by the brutal ways of German onslaught on the trenches. In September 1914 he wrote:

> "For the joke of seeing an obviously just cause defeated, I hope Germany will win. It would do the world good and show that real faith is not that which says 'we must win for our cause is just', but that which says 'our cause is

just: therefore we can disregard defeat'. All outlooks are at present material, and the unseen value of justice as justice, independent entirely of results, is forgotten. It is looked upon merely as an agent for winning battles."[3]

Sorley conceived a deep, almost loving admiration for his country. Though increasingly aware of the darker side of German culture, the militaristic spirit he applauded the efficiency, the love of learning and music and the simple patriotism that pervaded the country. When the War broke out, he appeared to be quite clear of his intentions that the Allied cause was just, and that it was his business as an English man to fight for his country for all the faults he saw in it. He subscribed to a deep loving admiration for the country.

Robert Graves, a contemporary of Sorley, described him in his book *Good Bye to All That* as "one of the three poets of importance killed during the War".(The other two were Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen). In his work Sorley may be seen as a forerunner of Owen and Sassoon. His unsentimental style stands in direct contrast to that of Rupert Brooke. Sorley's last poem which was recovered from his kit after his death which includes some of his most famous lines:

'When you see millions of mouthless dead

Across your dreams in pale battalions go".

Sorley's sole work was published posthumously in January 1916 and immediately became a literary success, with six editions printed the same year. Sorley is regarded by some, including the Poet Laureate John Masefield, as the greatest loss of all the poets who were killed during the First World War. Nevertheless he gives the impression of a mind already more mature than that of Brooke's, and a poetic gift, in spite of its youthful imperfections, that might have developed to far more impressive achievements than he had already shown.

Though the poems which Sorley wrote in the early months of the War show a kind of limited attitude. But the force of his work heralded the horror, anger and disillusionment that were to characterize the later works of the War Poets of the period. As John H. Johnston says: "Charles Hamilton Sorley was perhaps the most intellectually brilliant and perceptive of the English War Poets..."[4] Though only two or three of Sorley's poems could be said to rank with any others inspired by the First World War as specimens of the early response. They display a grasp of reality altogether beyond the talents of Brooke, Nichols and others. It is basically through his letters

that Sorley's personality and convictions have come up. His poems are a document of the development of an original and independent mentality. As John H. Johnston futher says that this "demonstrate the incalculable effects of the War in tragically terminating the potentialities of the best minds of a whole generation".[5]

When the War broke out with its upsurge of emotions, Sorley could assess the situation with calmness and maturity. He remained a critic of the sentiments expressed by those who very quickly identified their own reactions with the patriotic mood. Remarking on Hardy's *Satires of Circumstance* in a letter dated November 30, 1914, Sorley says: "Curiously enough, I think that 'Men who march away' is the most arid poem in the book, besides being untrue of the sentiments of the ranks man going to war: 'victory crowns the just' is the worst line he ever wrote---- filched from a leading article in *The Morning Post,* and unworthy of him who had always previously disdained to insult justice by offering it a material crown like Victory".[6]

Sorley's accurate penetration into Rupert Brooke's 'sentimental attitude' toward the War is another instance of his critical acuteness. In spite of the fact that Sorley's

patriotism was beyond doubt, he distrusted the emotions aroused by "childish and primitive questions of national honour"[7]

So far as Sorley's poetic career is concerned he had started writing poetry at the age of ten but we have only about thirty-eight poems which could be said to be the mature work and of these "only nine are classified by his editors as poems 'Of War and Death".[8] Though Sorley's life was cut short due to his untimely death and therefore he was denied the opportunity to witness the catastrophic war at length. He began to feel the meaninglessness of the argument for War before the battle of Loos claimed him in the autumn of 1915. He declared his spirit in a sonnet "*To Germany*", which ends in a truly prophetic attitude:

When it is peace, then we may view again
With new-won eyes each other's truer form
And wonder, Grown more loving-kind and warm
We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain
When it is peace. But until peace, the storm,
The darkness and the thunder and the rain".

(Marlborough and Other Poems, ll.5-7)

Sorley had perceived how grimly it came about, that the man in the trenches was cut off by an impassable gulf from the people at home:

"When you see millions of mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,
That you'll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For deaf, how should they know
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow. ..."

(*Marlborough and Other Poems*, ll.1-7)

In this poem Sorley speaks of the vast numbers who died and the finality of their passing, this time openly reproving the facile elegiac sentiments of 1914. As John H. Johnston puts:

> "The haunted, visionary quality of the sonnet brings to mind Hardy's "*The Souls of the Slain,* wherein the victims of the Boer War, after their spectral visit to England's shores, plunge "to the fathomless regions/ of myriads forgot".[9]

Sorley's poetic ideas evolved rapidly, but he did not survive to prove this evolution in a poetic expression which would

expand and clarify. The influence of Hardy- clearly visible in his later War poems--- is first apparent in "The River", which depicts the "black inscrutability' of the forces of nature; man can attain the strength that comes of unity" only by surrendering his mortal body to the "one great strength/ That moves and can not die".[10]

His pessimistic approaches are also visible in the poem entitled "*Rooks*" in which Sorley deals with the haunting transience and mystery of life:" we would live on , these birds and I , he cries:

"Yet how? Since everything must pass
At evening with the sinking sun,
And Christ is gone, and Barabbas,
Judas and Jesus, gone, clean gone,
Then how shall I live on?"

(*Marlborough and Other Poems*, ll. 1-5)

The extreme question in Sorley's conscience is of the complexity and subtlety of his spirituality. Sorley in these lines realises the facts of the existence. In his point of spiritual questioning he arrives at the conclusion that once life has come into existence it has to end sooner or later, this is the only reality of life. In his opinion everything has to pass from

this world as is evident from the image of "evening with the sinking sun', 'And Christ is gone, and Barabbas'. Here Sorley seems to be influenced by the younger generation of the Romantics. This approach of transience vs. permanence seems to be due to the influence of Keats.

Sorley's reaction to the War comes out most clearly in the octet of his sonnet "*To Germany*":

"You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.
But gropers both through fields of thought confined
We stumble and we do not understand.
You only saw your future bigly planned
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,
And in each other's dearest ways we stand,
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind".

(*CP.* ll. 1-9)

These lines display the meditative and brooding strain in Sorley's temperament.He demonstrates here an understanding of the historical significance of the crisis which was unique among the younger War poets of the First World War. Sorley valued his experiences in Germany and tried to account for

the human failures that lay behind the false attitude of the patriotic enmity. He could measure the depths of a tragedy which Brooke ignored. The spare, monosyllabic diction of *'To Germany* is characteristic of Sorley's nature of thought and expression. His blunt, economical use of vocabulary directly contrasts with Brooke's aureate use of phrases.

Whereas *"To Germany"* exhibits the meditative and contemplative nature of Sorley another poem entitled "All the hills and vales along" written about the same time subscribes to the harsher, more savage impulses which animated him:

"All the hills and vales along
Earth is bursting into song,
And the singers are the chaps
Who are going to die perhaps.
O sing marching men,
Till the valleys ring again.
Give your gladness no earth's keeping,
So be glad, when you are sleeping."

(*Marlborough and Other Poems*, ll. 1-8)

These lines once again show the mounting tension of the war situation in the mind of the poet. Sorley is prophesying the possible destruction awaiting in the front life. The aggravating

situation of the war-front forces him to foresee the possible catastrophic condition ahead in the life of the soldiers, hence the human loss. This also shows the prevalent mood of Sorley in most of his poems. He is speculative, contemplative and brooding over the future happenings. This poem is one of the most bitter- tasting marching songs ever written in the history of the War. It insists on the apartness of the earth from men's sufferings and death, and yet its oneness with them in their fate. He is trying to trace out the myths of life. This poem embodies the opposition between the human capacity of emotion, thought and action.

According to John H. Johnston "Sorley's irony", however, "reaches far beyond Housman's sardonic rejection of intellectual responsibility."[11] We could find here an echo of A. E. Housman's concept of Nature as hostile and indifferent to man:

"Earth that never doubts nor fears,
Earth that knows of death, not tears,
Earth that bore with joyful ease
Hemlock for Socrates,
Earth that blossomed and was glad
'Neath the cross that Christ had,

Shall rejoice and blossom too

When the bullet reaches you".

(M & O P, ll.1-8)

This poem has some similarities with Grenfell's "Into Battle", but it is a darker, more ironical poem. Sorley's War experience made him sure of his pre-war doubts which he had about the war. His criticism of Brooke is less than that of the culture which fostered him. As John Press says:

> "Life and literary criticism would be much simpler if human beings were less complex and unpredictable: the writings of Sorley during the four and a half months left to him after he had landed in France display an attitude of mind that is, if not contradictory, at least highly ambiguous."

But in Sorley's poetry there is no dearth of those elements which enjoyed self-sacrifice, courage and devotion to duty. The poems inspired by such values are the product of his thoughtful maturity. Given the incapability of irony or ambivalence in Georgian poetry, Sorley manages both an emotional association with its singers and an ironic reserve that evokes the tragic concern of their song. To put it in the words of John H. Johnston, the final stanza of "All the hills

and vales along", "echoes the very rhythm of men, whose intensified physical life and movement correspond briefly to the vitality present in the natural world":[12]

"Fom the hills and valleys earth
Shouts back the sounds of mirth,
Tramp of feet and lilt of song
Ringing all the road along.
All the music of their going,
Ringing swinging glad song -throwing,
Earth will echo still, when foot
Lies numb and voice mute.
On marching men,on
To the gates of death with song.
Sow your gladness for earth's reaping,
So you may be glad, though sleeping.
Strew your gladness on earth's bed,
So be merry, so be dead."

(*Marlborough and Other Poems*, ll.31-44)

Sorley here tries to well-knit his recurring reminders of death throughout the moments measuring a marching song. He combines, in these lines, the pathos of youthful vitality with the irony of its swift extinction. There is also an absence of

inspirational appeal, the celebration of the visible virtues and romantic self-contemplation. These lines give the image as if the soldier themselves are peering into their painful predicaments on the path of death. They know that they are going into the lap of death. Sorley visualizes the conflict as a catastrophi human tsunami. Sorley's imagery suggests that frustration, bewilderment and anguish which is clearly seen in later phase of the First World War Poetry.

The "*Two Sonnets*" of Sorley on death corresponds to the serious implications of elegiac tone. In the first of the *"Two Sonnets"*, Sorley voices the myriads who are destined to die. The undercurrent implications of prophetic imagination seem to constitute the sheer mass of humanity that the war could swallow. As John H. Johnston rightly points out, "Against the enormity of this sacrifice and its meaningless inevitability he envisions a hereafter completely stripped off conventional spiritual comforts"[13]. This aspect could well be seen in the following lines:

"Saints have adored the lofty souls of you.
Poets have whitened at your high renown.
We stand among the many millions who
Do hourly wait to pass your pathway down.

You, so familiar, once were strange: we tried

To live as of your presence unaware.

But now in every road on every side

We see your straight and stead fast signpost there.

I think it like that signpost in my land,

Hoary and tall, which pointed me to go

Upward into the hills, on the right hand,

Where the mists swim and the winds shriek and

Blow,

A homeless land and friendless, but a land

I did not know and that I wished to know."

(Marlborough and Other Poems, ll.1-14)

The poet visualizes 'Death' which brings no hope of consolation. There are hopelessness, bleakness and loneliness in a land far from the life hereafter. In the poet's opinion the 'steadfast signpost" is discovering the truth behind the illusions created by religion and the imagination. In the sonnet Sorley voices on behalf of the millions who are doomed to die. He unfolds his coldly stoic attitude, an attitude that is elaborated in the second sonnet. In this sonnet (Second of the "Two Sonnets") the bitterness of the truth is implied but can easily be discerned:

"Such , such is Death; no triumph: no defeat:

Only an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean,

A merciful putting away of what has been.

And this we know: Death is not Life effete,

Life crushed, the broken pai. We who have seen

So marvelous things know well the end not yet..."

(M&OP,ll.6)

Unlike Brooke, death for Sorley is not a transformation into 'a white unbroken glory' but a complete and final departure from all aspects of physical life, 'a slate rubbed clean, a merciful putting away of what has been'. So far as his language is concerned, Sorley projects his own vision of death: "We who have seen/so marvellous things know well the end not yet." As the War swallows millions, conventionally 'poetic ideas of spiritual survival and compensation enshrines a mockery of death.

Sorley is considered to be the first of the War poets who perceived the nature of warfare making it "easy to be dead". The conflict subscribing merely on "human attrition the loss of life bore a sacrificial aspect that could not longer be treated in conventional elegiac terms".[14] His last three sonnets present his own version of death, and they provide a perfect

opportunity to express idea and vision present in his attitude. De Sola Pinto's *Crisis in English Poetry* argues that Sorley broke away from the conventionally 'heroic' attitude of Brooke and Grenfell:

> "The poems that [Sorley] wrote in the last years of his life express new attitude to the war which are quite different from those of Brooke and Grenfell. They are the attitudes of men who have known the horror and boredom of modern warfare at first hand".[15]

It is with Sorley's verse that the tendencies of the First World War poetry reveals themselves. Sorley exhibited intellectual and imaginative powers that directed those attitudes. Hence, though his poems are few in number, Sorley could have established himself as a poet of the Great War with honour and respect. To conclude it would be appropriate to quote Hazel Powell to get the exact picture of Sorley: "Sorley is of particular interest because he was writing at the beginning of the War, yet his poems show a maturity of outlook and a realism which was out of step with most of the other poets of the time."[16]

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CHAPTER – V

Edmund Charles Blunden

(1896-1974)

When the war began, Blunden was of about eighteen years old. He was born in Yalding, Kent. He attended Christ's Hospital London. Edmund Charles Blunden joined army in 1914 and experienced war in the trenches. He served with the Royal Sussex Regiment from 1915 and fought on the Somme. He wrote a number of poems, his poems such as "*Third Ypres*" and "*Report on Experience*" may be cited as representative examples of his war poetry. In these poems he not only recalls his war experiences but also expresses his sense of guilt for not attaining martyrdom, which is a dominant theme in his poetry. His poems are deeply moving and constitute the characteristic of the man and his attitude to the War. His best-known work "*Undertones of War*" describes the double destruction of man and Nature. His longing for the fragrance of ancient peace is described in a beautiful manner. He gives a brilliant description of his war experiences in his book *Undertones of War.* In this prose work he beautifully sums up

his experiences of War. His account of the Somme battle is perhaps most impressive and memorable for the reason that it gives true account of the chaos and confusion shared by those who took part in the War.

Although the verse of Blunden certainly embodies something of the physical and spiritual distress that informs Sassoon's productions, his range of visualization is much wider and his imagination is not as obsessed with the crude details of suffering and death. His poetry is not inspired by any purposefully creative intent, nor is limited by the motives and techniques of disillusion. His eye ranges freely over the phenomena of war; he discovers poetry in the ravaged landscape. His poetry portrays homes and deserted farms. Like Sassoon, Blunden also finds poetry in the trenches and in the moral and physical cries of personal experience. His lyrical responses are more sensitive, more varied and more controlled than those of Sassoon. His emotional reactions are not predetermined by a strongly negative attitude but emerge spontaneously as a significant element of his depictions.

Blunden's war verse dates from the spring of 1916, when he experienced his first period of service in the trenches. By this time romantic idealism had nearly spent itself as a motivating

force for poetry, except for a final resurgence just before the Somme battles. Blunden entered the war too late to be affected by its influence so deeply. Though rather young and romantic in his own fashion, he made development as a nature poet to echo his own response.

Blunden's verse deals with the disagreeable realities of the war. The poet sees the harmonies and beauties of nature, as well as the productions of man's patient industry destroyed or defaced by the inhuman mechanism of war, the result is an alien and sinister world which he can discern only from pathetic vestiges of normality. Thus, Blunden found most of his poetry neither in a baseless idealism nor in purposive realism, but in a humanely aesthetic sense of desecration. He is not merely a nature poet of the war; his unflinching eye and strength of phrase can cope with the most appalling of scenes.

The most characteristic qualities of Blunden's poetry are derived from the themes and traditions of eighteenth – century pastoral loves. His delight in simple observation, his evocation of a wide range of rural scenes, his sensitivity to the rhythms and harmonies of nature-all these indicate his close relationship with Thomson, Young, Collins, Cowper and Clare. It is John Clare, however, Blunden admires most; he is "in

some lights the best poet of Nature that this country and for all I know any other country ever produced".[1] Blunden's description of war and reflective lyricism rank him with the best inspired by the War. An analysis of his war poems will show how he maintained his ability to see things responsively.

In "*The Zonnebeke Road*" the poet vividly evokes the oppression and anguish that inform the landscape by objectifying his feelings in the details of his description:

"Look, how the snow- dust whisks along the road,
Piteous and silly; the stones themselves must flinch
In this east wind; the low sky like a load
Hangs over—a dead-weight. But what a pain
Must gnaw where its clay cheek
Crushes the shell-chopped trees that fang the plain-
The ice-bound throat gulps out a gargoyle shriek.
The wretched wire before the village line
Rattles like rusty brambles or dead bine,
And then the daylight oozes into dun;
Black pillars, those are trees where roadways run."

(CP, ll. 21-31)

In these lines the poet is specially responsive to the sinister and malignant aspects of the frontline war. But he seeks effects of a different order than those of simple physical horror. The poet is shocked and astonished at nature of the war which has caused so much destruction. He is pointing out on the condition of the frontline scenario. There is a graphic reproduction of an imaginative enlargement of the scene. He transforms the details into an ordered and poetically significant whole.

In another poem "*Third Ypres*" Blunden expresses a modern battle narrative in verse and contrast it to the heroic poem. This poem is powerful evocation of anguish and horror. This poem opens with a reference to the rising sun; the poet then goes on to depict the half-incredulous anticipation of victory among those who have survived the first day of the battle:

"Triumph! How strange, how strong had triumph come
One weary hate of soul and endless war
When from its grey gravecloths awoke anew
The summer day. Among the tumbled wreck
Of fascined lines and mounds the light was
Peering,
Half- smiling upon us and our new found pride,

The terror of the waiting night outlived,

The time too crowded for the heart to count

All the sharp cost in friends killed on the assault.

No hook of all the octopus had held us,

Here stood we trampling down the ancient tyrant.

So shouting dug we among the monstrous pits."

(CP, ll. 1-12)

These lines are generalized in perception relating to the progress of the battle as a whole. The poet registers not only his reactions to the condition but also to the moods and emotions of his fellow soldiers. These emotions begin to waver between doubt and joy as an unnatural silence settling over the battlefield. As the next lines of the same poem elaborates:

Amazing quite fell upon the waste,

Quite intolerable to those who felt

The hurrying batteries beyond the masking hills

For their new parley setting themselves in array

In crafty fourms unmapped

Faith,

Are dumb for the reason of their overthrow.

They move not back, they lie among the crews

Twisted and choked, they'll never speak again.

Only the copse where once might stand a shrine
Still clacked and suddenly hissed its bullets by.
The war would end; the Line was on the move,
And a bound the impassable was passed.
We lay and waited with extravagant joy."

(CP, ll. 13-26)

As the day progresses it is apparent that this joy is ill-founded; no word comes back from the first wave of infantry. The rain begins; and the German artillery resumes firing. At this point the narrator speaks for the first time in his own person:

"And you
Poor signaler, you I passed by this emplacement,
You whom I warned, poor daredevil, waving your flags..."

Here the sensibility of the poet as an individual begins to take over; the narrative does not lose its chronological progression. As an observer the poet visualizes the progress of the battle and the hopes and fears of those who are engaged in it. These lines also depict the personal sufferings due to the war. This poem ends in an abrupt and inconclusive fashion. In the following lines the poet comes to a frantic call for aid:

"For God's sake send and help us,

Here in a gunpit, all headquarters done for,

Forty or more, the nine – inch came right through,

All splashed with arms and legs, and I myself

The only one not killed, not even wounded.

You'll send—God bless you!"

(CP,ll.116-21)

There is helplessness on the part of the speaker. He is helpless due to the unbearable condition of the warfront. He needs help for his fellow soldiers and for himself. In these lines Blunden produced some of the most effective poetry of the Great War. Blunden's "*Third Ypres*" "vividly conveys the feeling of helplessness which many felt by the end of the year as the war dragged on in a seemingly timeless way. It was as if it had a life of its own".[2]

In "*Preparation for Victory*" also the poet is saddened with the future prospects of the war. In his view the prolonging war is senseless. It has got no end at all. At one point the speaker hopes for his capability to do something good as he can. But the inner conscience of the poet is saddened with the negative hope.

As is evident in the following lines:

"I'll do my best', the soul makes sad reply,
And I will mark the yet unmurdered tree,
The tokens of dear homes that court the eye,
And yet I see them not as I would see.
Hovering between, a ghostly enemy.
Sickens the light, and poisoned, withered, wan,
The least defiled turns desperate to me,
The body, poor unpitied Caliban,
Parches and sweats and grunts to win the name of Man."

(CP, ll. 10-18)

These lines speak of the truth of the warfare. The speaker is complaining of the human predicament. The war has left only the destroyed trees and human bodies. They are lying dead unnoticed. The enemy has poisoned the hope and all aspirations. The scene of the warfront saddens the poet and makes his heart sick because this war has caused a lot of destruction.

Blunden's descriptions of the war experiences are a live testimony of a soldier who saw the gun battle going on in front of his eyes. He has his own way of explaining his war experiences. His war poetry is a real expression of the

contemporary situation he witnessed. As a contrast to the other poets of the period defining typical situations in a typical manner. His 'realism' in expressing the war details affect the whole of our mind.

In *"Come on, My Lucky Lads"* the poet has given an excellent description of the warfront in the following lines:

"O rosy red, O torrent splendour
Staining all the Orient gloom,
O celestial work of wonder-
A million mornings in one bloom!..."

(CP,ll. 1-4)

Though the poet is expressing the wonder of the flower but undertones of these lines are paradoxical. According to the poet rose is beautiful and splendid. It's a great creation of the Nature. In one single morning millions of flowers bloom. The paradox here is that as rose is great and blooms in the garden in a large quantity at a time; in a similar manner human beings are also the greatest creation of the Nature. But instead of blooming human lives are being dragged into the catastrophic situation. Thousands and thousands of human lives are killed and perished every day for no reasons. It's a

pity on the part of the poet. He feels heart ache. It is a matter of concern for him and for the entire humanity.

Within the range of his response to the Great War, Blunden produced some of the most effective of the War Poetry. "Although his characteristic work deals with the disruption of harmony in the world of nature and civilized order"[3], he sometimes dramatically captures the overwhelming sense of pity that distinguishes the verse of Owen. "It's plain we were born for this, naught else", writes Blunden in "*Zero*"; but this bleak sense of necessity magnifies the consciousness of individual suffering to unbearable proportions in "*Trench Raid near Hooge*". The decorous literary image in the first stanza evokes a contrast between the conventional- but somehow reassuring poetic visualization of dawn and the brutal reality of pre-dawn bombardment:

At an hour before the rosy-fingered
Morning should come
To wonder again what meant these sties,
These wailing shots, these glaring eyes,
These moping mum,
Through the black reached strange long rosy
fingers

All at one aim protending, and bending: down they swept,

Successions of similars after leapt

And bore red flame."

(CP, ll. 1-11)

These lines not only present the mere physical effects of the war but it is also important in terms of its tragic effect and its shattering psychological implications. As John H. Johnston rightly puts it as, "The 'fierce truth' of war can be captured only when these effects achieve some kind of extension in the soul of the poet who is capable of interpreting his own and others' sufferings in the light of tragic experience."[4] Blunden's sensitivity to suffering is often independent of his own ordeals and exposures to hazard. It is a record of his experience of the pity of war. His experience of war is traumatic amid the havoc wrought by the war.

Similarly in "*Concert Party: Busseboom*", he portrays:

"To his new concert, white we stood;

Cold certainly held our breath;

While menin the tunnels below Larch Wood

Were kicking men to death."

(CP, ll. 1-4)

Here the description is of the high spirits induced by a soldier's entertainment, however, it chills the heart of the departing audience. These lines portray the sympathetically imaginative yet realistic perceptions of the poet. By and large, Blunden is almost pathetic in most of his poems which clearly indicate the trauma of the situation.

If we go deep into the writings of Blunden we would find that there is no satire in his poems. His occasional irony is employed only to enforce the impact of some meaningful contrast. Blunden is the most lighthearted of the World War I poets; yet the strain of the war seems to have affected his consciousness nearly as much as it affected Sassoon's. Several post-war poems, testify to a sense of artistic debility and evince a haunted state of mind.

In *"1916 Seen From 1921"*, Blunden portrays himself as troubled by vivid memories and the "lost intensities" of emotions he could not do away with:

"Tired with dull grief, grown old before my day,
I sit in solitude and only hear
Long silent laughters, murmurings of dismay,
The lost intensities of hope and fear;

In those old marshes yet the rifles lie,

On the thin breastwork flutter the grey rags..."

In this poem the poet seems to be tired of the effects of the war. The poet is hopeless and disheartened. There is despair and hopelessness on the part of the poet. The aggravating situation of the war has so much frustrated the poet that he has grown old before time. The treacherous war has broken all his hopes and aspirations. The poem depicts an image of a man full of despair.

The calm sense of an interrupted poetic vocation is perhaps Blunden's chief asset. Within the range of the brief depiction the poet has developed a response that captured the larger disharmonies behind the crude and confusing data of warfare. The poet is in the awareness of the pity of suffering and death. He occasionally brings a perception of the tragic necessity of the war evils.

In the "*Two Voices*" the poet says:

"Now far withdraws the roaring night

Which wrecked our flower after the first

Of those two voices; misty light

Shrouds Thiepval Wood and all its worst;

But still 'There's something in the air' I hear,

And still 'We're going South, man' deadly near."

These lines describe the poet's description of the horrible condition of the war. The poet is depressed with the outraged condition of wrecked flower. There is destruction on all corners of life. Because of the war nature has also been destroyed. He has a sense of apprehension that something more dastardly may happen resulting in the innumerable loss of human lives and nature.

In the final stanza of "*Come on My Lucky Lads*" the blood shed and the booming sounds of the bomb disturbs the poet. He becomes a victim of nihilism. He measures life as an entity of death and decay:

"The swooning white of him, and that red!

These bombs in boxes, the craunch of shells,

The second-hand fitting round; ahead!

It's plain we were born for this, naught else."

(*CP*, ll.25-28)

Here the poet realizes the meaninglessness of life and this world. He seems to be disgusted and disjointed with the current war scenario. He is in the pitiable condition. Because

war has taken him into a world where there is no hope but only hopelessness. The imagery of l around destruction has taken him for the first time in no man's land. According to him the war is being fought for no reasons. The irony of the situation is that though the human beings are the greatest creation of the Nature still in the most dangerous condition. The human beings which should enjoy the highest spirit of the universe have been dragged into the state of destruction and catastrophe.

In another description of war the poet says:

"How unpurposed, how inconsequential
Seemed those southern lines when in the parlor
Of the dying winter
First we went there!"

(*CP*,ll. 1-4)

Through his deeper thoughts and speculations war is simply an absorption into the unknown. The implication of these lines speaks out against the main tendencies of the war and a series of violent actions. To the poet war seems to be useless and unwarranted. The poet exposes the unexpected realism and concerns of survival. He is trying to defy the inhuman

circumstances of the war itself. As Paul Fussell rightly points out, Blunden's "vision of nature is always ravaged in human terms and images indicates what his gentle heart has been attentive to all the while."[5]

To conclude it may be said that Blunden goes on the razor's edge of loss, despair and hopelessness due to the war effects. He is not violent as Sassoon but the way he expresses the realities of the warfront is a tireless effort on his part to convey the message of his frustration and discussed. He seems to be in need of an answer of the present scenario. In brief, his poetry is full of war time frustration ultimately taking him in to the world of existentialist view of the human predicament.

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CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to study five eminent poets of the First World War (1914-1918). They are Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, C. H. Sorley and Edmund Blunden. They are the poets who actually enlisted themselves in the war and therefore, they had the first hand experience of the conditions of the front and the life in trenches.

The first and the most important poet in this regard is Wilfred Owen. Owen's struggle with, loss, despair, pity and alienation threaten to undermine everything he fights for. Owen as a War Poet, addresses the realities of the war as they were. For example, in "*Disabled*" he not only reveals the 'young soldiers' physical wounds but also exposes the man's mental anguish and dissatisfaction with the current situation. He uses his poems to speak about the horrible terror he had experienced. Certainly Owen's war poetry is a driving force behind his

emergence as a strong and original poet of the First World War.

Owen's war experiences took him out of the boundaries of Romanticism. The quest for truth prompted some of his greatest works of the time. Like Sassoon Owen also wrote in reaction to the propagandized view of the war that was being made public throughout England. Newspaper accounts of the Great War seemed baseless and absurd. It added fuel to the fire and made him 'angry young poet'. As Paul Fussel rightly asserts that, though Owen had been strikingly optimistic but Owen's first hand experience in the mid of the January, 1917 changed everything. Owen wrote about his feelings in his poems to express his message as directly as possible. The cumulative effect of his war experiences opened an ideal avenue to raise questions about the meaning of war.

Some of his poems such as, "*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*", and "*Disabled*" lash out against what he may have considered the nonsensical and unaccountable death of young soldiers. Others such as "*The Last Laugh*", and "*The Sentry*", describe in detail the trauma and horrors of the trenches and the battlefields. Had he not joined the army, and experienced the trenches, probably he would not have penned his most

famous poems or be remembered as one of the greatest war poets of the First World War. Owen's war poetry is not only the truthful expression of the trench condition but a living memory for all generations to come. Had he survived, it is very difficult to say, where he would have led. Some critics are of the opinion that in Owen's case, it was the subject matter that made the poet. Unfortunately his untimely death could not allow Owen to prove it otherwise. Nevertheless, the poetry of Owen continues to draw attention and acclaim in every sense of the term.

The chapter on Sassoon's poetry focuses not only on the angry voice and disillusionment but also on his efforts to create a meaning out of the conflict. He still maintains his reputation among the readers of English poetry and hopefully will always inspire the greatest of all poets like Wilfred Owen and others as well. Sassoon's poetry is always said to be the voice of anger and disillusionment, but it also provided an opportunity to voices that had been silent. His sense of anger stems from his feelings of complete disillusionment. Sassoon's poetry denounces the war and its intensity of violence, aimed at wiping out the human civilization.

If Sassoon tries to hold on to his anger, Brooke attempts to step away from anger and disillusion. He takes war as a driving force of eternity and peace. It was war that provided him to seek shelter against the troubles and sufferings he was coping with.

Sorley corresponds to the elegiac tone speaking of the myriads who are destined to die. His prophetic imagination in his war poems is a testimony to the horrors of war that would swallow the mass of humanity. Sorley, perhaps, may be seen as a forerunner of Owen and Sassoon. His unsentimental style stands in direct contrast to that of Rupert Brooke. Sorley's last poem which was discovered from his kit after his death, include some of his most famous lines:

> "When you see millions of mouthless dead
> Across your dreams in pale battalions go..."

Despite the horrors of the First World War Sorley felt it had freed his spirit. He stands out startlingly straightforward in search of a meaningful life hereafter. He seems to be fearless in search of spirituality.

Edmund Charles Blunden consequently goes into a grey land of loss, despair and hopelessness. Indeed he is not as violent

as Sassoon but the words and terminology he has used express a tireless and continuous sense of alienation, despair and helplessness. He shoots out words after words of frustration against the War. He seems to be a tired and helpless man searching for something meaningful. His personal accord of his war experiences in *Undertones of War* is hailed as the greatest and lasting tribute to the unknown soldier. He is well-known as a poet and autobiographer but was haunted, for the rest of his life, by his experiences as a young infantry officer.

In short, it may be concluded that after their bitter experience of the actual war, almost all of these Combatant Poets arrived at the universal truth that War is the greatest enemy of human civilization and development. In spite of their differences in conceptualization and presentation of the war each of these poets faced the same existentialist problem.

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